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"BANTY," HE SAID, FINALLY, "HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A DETECTIVE LIKE MYSELF?"

Banty, the Denver Bootblack,

OR,

DOC DERRINGER,

The DARK-LANTERN DETECTIVE
The Romance of a Remarkable Con-
spiracy in the Colorado Capital.

BY EDWARD LYTTON WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF THE "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS.

CHAPTER I.

A DESPERATE MAN.

It was a dark, stormy night, in the city of Denver, Colorado—such a wild, tempestuous night as had not been experienced during the season.

The wind blew down through streets, from the mountain foot-hills, chill and piercing despite the fact that it was midsummer, and with the wind came torrents of rain, lightning and deep detonations of thunder.

Few people were abroad, and only now and then was seen a person out of doors.

The street lamps gave forth only a flickering light, and old Boreas seemed to be holding wild riot, at will.

The storm was at its height, about an hour before midnight, when a close carriage, drawn by two spirited horses, was driven at a rapid rate through some of the principal dwelling thoroughfares.

The driver was muffled to the chin in an oil-skin coat, which in a measure protected him from the rain, and urged his horses along at faster speed, by frequent applications of the whip.

The curtains of the carriage were closely drawn, and the occupant of the interior, consequently, was in darkness.

The vehicle sped on, until, finally, an aristocratic locality was reached, when a halt was made in front of a handsome stone residence.

The neighborhood was one of the wealthiest in Denver, while, by the appearance of the house in question, one could easily judge it was the abode of wealth and fashion.

The driver of the carriage did not dismount on drawing rein, but allowed his passenger to open the door for himself, and clamber out of the vehicle, in the still drenching rain.

"You wait!" the passenger ordered, and then hastened to mount the steps leading to the front door of the mansion.

He was a young man in years, probably not exceeding twenty-three or four, with a well-knit figure, of medium stature, a clear-cut, intelligent countenance that was rather handsome of feature, with deep blue eyes and graceful brown mustache.

In attire he wore only a plain business suit and dark derby hat, so that there was nothing particularly flashy or stylish in his appearance.

Mounting the steps, he rung the bell, and the summons was speedily answered by a colored lad, in livery, who surveyed the caller rather suspiciously.

"Is Mr. Wylton in?" the stranger asked.

"De boss done hab gone to bed. Too late, sah, to receive callers, sah. Come to-morrow!"

And the sable servitor made an attempt to shut the door.

In this, however, he was unsuccessful, for the caller pushed it forcibly open, and stepped into the hall.

"No, you don't!" he said, rather gruffly. "I called to see Henry Wylton, and see him I'm going to, so you may as well hustle yourself straightway into his presence, and inform him that a dear and near friend awaits to see him, in the parlor. No back talk now, but make a move before I make your tar-heels break your neck!"

The young waiter's eyes bulged out, in some surprise, at this unceremonious style of address, and he made haste to close the door.

"What's your name, sah?" Sambo asked. "You can step into de parlor, sah, and I will go see ef de boss will receive callers. Youh card, sah!"

"I have no card. Tell your employer that a personal friend wants to see him, on a matter of life and death. That will do quite as well as though I told my name!"

Sambo bowed and hurried away through the wide, silent hall, while the stranger entered the front parlor, where a single jet of the gas chandelier was dimly burning.

It was a large apartment, magnificently fur-

nished in partly modern, partly Oriental style, the carpeting sinking like velvet beneath the tread, while the ebony furniture, the rare pictures, the costly bric-a-brac were worth a fortune in themselves.

Surely no prince could have desired a more luxurious apartment or palatial abode.

The storm visitor did not seat himself, but turning the gas a little higher, began to quietly examine the trinkets in the room, as if he were curious to find some particular one, or more.

His search was finally interrupted by the sound of a footfall in the hall, and turning, he stood face to face with the man he had sent for—Henry Wylton, the wealthiest pawnbroker and money-lender in the West—a man reported to be able to count his ready money at a million of dollars.

He was a short, portly individual, past middle age, with a thick neck, florid face, and little gray eyes.

He wore a bushy pair of iron-gray side-whiskers, while his hair of the same hue was clipped closely to his head.

He was attired in a black suit and easy slippers, and in his immaculate shirt-front glittered a costly solitaire diamond.

A look of unutterable astonishment settled upon his hard-expressed face, commingled with anger, when he found the younger man standing face to face with him.

"Lloyd Lindsay! You here?" he articulated.

"Henry Wylton, I am here?" was the prompt answer. "Are you really surprised to see me?"

"Certainly I am surprised. I should not be more surprised if I saw Satan standing before me!"

"Indeed! And yet you must naturally expect a visit from him one of these days!"

At which sarcastic retort Wylton winced.

"None of your insolence to me, sir!" he cried.

"I'll not tolerate a bit of it. What brought you here?"

"What do you suppose?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," the broker unhesitatingly replied.

Lindsay smiled contemptuously.

"You must be getting forgetful of the past!" he observed. "Sit down yonder, and I will endeavor to enlighten you!"

"I do not choose to sit down, sir, nor am I inclined to be enlightened by one of your stamp," Wylton replied, fiercely. "So state your business and then take your departure!"

"Oh! I may not see fit to take my departure at your bidding!" Lindsay retorted. "You know well enough what I have come for. I want my wife or your life—either one or the other! So sit down in that chair, while I talk business to you!" and drawing a revolver from his pocket, he deliberately cocked it.

Wylton turned pale with anger rather than fear, and responded with fierce emphasis:

"Put up that weapon, or I'll call for assistance, and have you arrested!"

"Try it!" retorted Lindsay, with a significant nod, "and if I don't put out the light of your candle, you can call me a liar. I came to you as a desperate man, to-night, Henry Wylton, and I will stand no trifling. Where is my wife?"

"What do I know about your wife? I am not aware that you ever had one!"

"You lie! Just one year ago, I married your daughter, Hazel Wylton!"

"Bah! you did nothing of the sort! I know you coaxed the silly girl to elope with you, but as no ceremony was ever performed you have no claim upon her whatever!"

"A legal ceremony was performed, and but for you, curse you, I would now be living with her. Oh! Henry Wylton, a day of reckoning is to come, between you and me, whom you have so villainously wronged, and when it does come, look out for me! I shall have no more mercy for you than you have had for me!"

"Nonsense! I never wronged you!"

"Again you lie! A year ago, when a clerk in your employ, I came to you, like an honorable man, and asked for your daughter's hand in marriage. You scornfully refused to give your consent, and called me hard names. This ill-treatment only fired me with a determination to have Hazel in spite of you, as we loved each other truly; so we made arrangements to go to Chicago, which we did, and were there legally married."

"Fortune favored me, and I got work at good wages, and Hazel and I were getting along admirably, when you appeared upon the scene, and had me arrested upon a trumped-up charge of bigamy! I of course was a stranger in Chicago, and poor, while you were known, and a millionaire."

"You produced a woman, whom I had never seen but once before"—here Lindsay paused a moment, and looked direct at the broker in something like a triumphant way—"and the woman swore black and blue, that I was her husband, and was the father of her two-year-old child, which was produced in evidence. She also produced a marriage-certificate, dated three years before, which certified that this woman, Adele Daly, was married to me in the city of Denver, by one Peter Patterson, a minister of the gospel—to all of which I answered truthfully that I never was in the city of Denver, nor even in the State of Colorado, until at least a year after the certificate of this alleged marriage was dated."

"You thereupon declared that I perjured myself; that I was in your employ at the time I claimed not to be in the State; that you were personally knowing to the fact of my having associated with said Adele Daly, that you were satisfied of the validity of the marriage with her and were willing to back up your opinion with your capital and your honor, which latter, in Denver, you stated was regarded as unimpeachable."

"Well, there could be but one result. You had money; I had none; I was sent off to prison pending a further hearing of the case which your machinations prevented my ever having."

"Now, Henry Wylton, scoundrel that you are, I have come for my wife and child, and I want them!"

Lindsay took a couple of steps nearer the broker, and gazed at him in a steady, deadly stare.

Wylton, though a man of strong nerve, quailed under the accusing gaze of the infuriated and desperate man.

"You want *what*?" he demanded, feigning surprise.

"My wife and babe!" was the stern reply. "I should be a father ere this, and I want wife and child, or your life. The former or the latter I will have before I leave this house!" and he fingered his revolver nervously.

CHAPTER II.

A DESPERATE WOMAN.

A FEW minutes previous to the time the foregoing scene was occurring in the parlor of the Wylton mansion, another scene was transpiring in a cozily-furnished room of the same residence—a dimly-lighted apartment overlooking a rear flower garden, in which, besides the beds of hardy and of exotic flowers, was a spraying fountain and a couple of rustic, vine-embowered arbors.

The apartment was fitted as a bed-chamber, rather than as a parlor or sitting-room, although the requisites of a parlor were present.

It was, in every sense, such a room as would give equal comfort and pleasure to one confined there.

Flowers bloomed in the windows, that sent forth a delicate perfume, and bouquets on the mantel added their beauty and fragrance.

The only light was furnished by an oil lamp, and, dim as it was, it was sufficient to disclose an alcove bed, upon the pillows of which lay a young woman, most beautiful, even though her features were pallid, and betrayed signs of suffering.

She was not sleeping; on the contrary, her eyes were wide open and fixed upon the ceiling, in a stony sort of stare.

Her mind, evidently, was wandering.

Near the bedside was a pretty, curtained infant's cradle, with the curtains closely drawn.

Not far from the bed, in a great easy-chair, sat a man whose eyes were closed, and indicated that he was asleep—a smoothly-shaven, rather hard-visaged man of fifty, with silvery hair, and the indisputable stamp of a physician.

Upon a stand near at hand were bottles and other indispensable adjuncts of the sick-room, and the air was sensibly pervaded with the odor of drugs.

That the physician slept at his post was evidenced by occasional snores which came at intervals like explosions.

One of these appeared to arouse the sick woman, for she sat bolt upright in bed, and gazed toward her attendant, the light of reason seeming to come into her eyes.

"My God! what a dream!" she murmured, as her gaze reverted to the cradle. "I thought they had stolen away my babe!"

Then she softly got out of bed, looking tall and spectral in her flowing robe of snowy white.

Gently she moved to the cradle, and parted the curtains.

The white bed of softest pillows was there, not the babe the invalid had expected to see!

The babe was gone!

The poor woman gave no outcry at the discovery, but, faint and gasping, reeled back, and for a moment seemed about to fall to the floor.

She recovered herself, however, and stole toward the stand containing the bottles, and carefully examined them, taking care not to make any noise, lest she should awaken the doctor.

One bottle was labeled "Chloroform," and beside it was a sponge.

"My worst fears are realized," the woman gasped, wringing her hands in an agony of despair. "I have been kept under the influence of drugs, while my child has been stolen away from me. Oh! father! father! what have you done—what have you done!"

Again she reeled, and it seemed that, with her feeble strength, she must fall; but she quickly rallied, and a light of strong resolution shone from her beautiful eyes.

She stole to a private escritoire, and took therefrom two deadly weapons—a jewel-hilted dagger, and a small-caliber seven-shot revolver.

She carefully cocked the latter, and with a weapon in either hand stole toward the sleeping doctor.

When she reached him, she kicked him with her unslipped foot, and he awakened with a sudden start, to find the beautiful invalid confronting him, and the revolver pressed within an inch of his temple.

"Silence, Doctor La Forge!" was the low but firm order. "Attempt to make any outcry and I will shoot you. Where is my child?"

"Your child!" the doctor gasped. "Why, is it not in the cradle?"

"No, it is not, and well you know it! Francis La Forge, my precious little one has been stolen, at the instance of my cruel, unnatural father. You know where it is, and who took it. Tell me, or, as sure as there is a God in high heaven, I'll kill you now and here!"

She spoke with a fierceness born of utter desperation, and La Forge turned pale with alarm.

"I repeat that I know not what has become of the child, if it is not in the cradle!" he gasped. "It was there a few minutes ago, when I dropped asleep."

"You lie!" Hazel Wylton declared, fiercely. "The little bed is not even rumpled where my babe should be lying. Once more I command you, villain that you are, to tell me where is my child!"

"I cannot do so. Go ask your father. He knows, if any one!" La Forge replied. "I know nothing whatever as to its whereabouts, nor who is responsible for its absence."

"Yet you were in the conspiracy to keep me drugged, so that my poor, innocent babe could be torn away from me, you scoundrel!" hissed Hazel. "Take that, for your part in the base conspiracy!"

And with strengthful arm she raised her dagger and plunged it into the physician's breast.

Then, not waiting to note the effect of her blow, she turned and fled from the room.

She was no longer weak, but nerved to supernatural strength through desperate resolve.

She fled down the two flights of stairs that intervened between her room and the parlor floor, with as much alacrity as though she had not seen a day of sickness.

Just as she reached the foot of the stairs, she heard a wild shout, coming from the parlor, that nearly froze the blood in her veins.

She recognized the voice; she rushed forward, flung open the parlor door and bounded into the room, crying:

"Lloyd! Lloyd! Where are you?"

She found her father standing in the center of the parlor, near a marble-top heater, that, in winter-time, warmed the apartment; but he was alone.

Lloyd Lindsay was not present!

"Lloyd! Lloyd! Where is he, father?" Hazel demanded, advancing toward her parent, pale as death, and still clutching the cocked revolver in her grasp. "Tell me instantly, where is my husband, Lloyd Lindsay?"

"Child! child! how imprudent of you to leave your room!" the broker replied, without heeding her questions. "Do you not know you are risking your life?"

"Answer me!" Hazel cried, fiercely, at the same time covering him with the aim of her revolver. "This is no time for parley, when I am desperate. Answer me, or I will kill you!"

The broker shrunk back in alarm.

There was desperation in Hazel's mien, sure enough, and there was fury in her blazing eyes.

"Why, Hazel! Hazel!" he said, in a soothing tone, "what is the matter with you? Have you gone stark mad? I will ring for Doctor—"

"Stop!" she cried, stamping her foot, "don't you dare to touch the bell. You ask me if I have gone stark mad? I answer you 'yes;' I am murder mad! I have killed your villainous tool, the doctor, and if you don't tell me where are Lloyd and my babe, I will kill you! Speak! tempt me not, for I'll have no mercy now. Where is Lloyd?"

"Why, good God! Lloyd has not been here, child. He is in the Penitentiary at Joliet, I think."

"He is not! He was here to-night. I heard him cry out before I rushed into this room. Henry Wylton, inhuman parent that you are, have you added murder to the sins upon your soul?—have you killed my husband, Lloyd Lindsay?"

She had stepped a few paces nearer to him, and still kept the revolver leveled at his heart.

"No! no! my poor child. Your mind is wandering. You heard no one cry out, for I swear to you Lloyd has not been here to-night. You must return to your room!"

"Never!" Hazel cried, firmly. "I have left it for the last time. You swear to me that Lloyd has not been here to-night, but I know you lie! I heard his voice, and by its tone, I know he was appealing for help. You have murdered him, and I swear by high Heaven, that you shall suffer the consequences! I leave your house to-night forever. You have killed my husband; at least be merciful enough, before I go, to tell me what you have done with my little baby boy!"

Henry Wylton immediately assumed a look of gravity.

"The child is dead," he said, in a husky tone. "The poor little thing died a week ago, and I had it laid away to rest in your own lot in the cemetery, and a stone erected, containing its name, date of birth and death. Fearful lest your grief over the loss should utterly prostrate you, the doctor deemed it advisable to keep you in a semi-unconscious state, until you should gain strength enough to bear the news!"

This explanation was given with all apparent sincerity, but that she did not believe a word of it, Hazel announced by uttering a dry, scornful laugh.

"Do you think I will believe you?" she retorted. "No! never! I now leave your roof forever. I go forth in search of my child, and the detectives shall find my husband be he dead or alive. Make no attempt to stop me, or I will shoot you down as I would a dog, monster that you are!"

And keeping him covered, she began to back toward the door.

"You are crazy!" the broker cried. "You shall not leave this house!" and minding not that she held the power of death in her grasp, he rushed toward her.

She kept her word; there was a flash, a sharp report, and with a groan, Wylton staggered backward and fell to the floor, while the desperate young woman, with the smoking weapon still in her grasp, fled from the room.

She crossed the hall into the library and lit the gas.

Five minutes later, enveloped in a hooded waterproof, she left the house.

CHAPTER III.

DOC DERRINGER ENLISTS.

THE chief of police of Denver sat in his private office, engaged in reverie, while he puffed away leisurely at a fragrant Havana.

He was a well-built man, in the thirties, with a countenance of more than average intelligence, adorned with a pair of keen, observing eyes, and a mustache that was slightly sprinkled with gray.

Occasionally he glanced at a clock on the wall, and then puffed away once more at his cigar.

It was early forenoon of a sunny day, some two weeks after the occurrence of the events narrated in our previous chapters.

The windows in the chief's office were raised, and admitted a bracing breeze from the great hills.

At precisely nine, by the clock, a clerk entered, handed the chief a report, and retired again to another office.

The chief's brows knitted in a frown of displeasure as he read the report, and, flinging away his cigar, he pulled nervously away at his mustache.

Just then the door once more opened, and a young man stood upon the threshold.

"Are you busy, chief?" he inquired.

"No. Come in, Doc, and have a seat. You're just the fellow I've been wanting to see. Where've you been keeping yourself lately?"

"Over in Georgetown," was the reply, and, entering the room, the young man took a seat opposite the chief.

He was apparently twenty-two years of age, of medium stature, and, as far as appearances were concerned, was just an every-day, ordinary-looking fellow—not one who would be called homely, neither was he in any sense a handsome man.

His face, round and fresh, wore a good-humored expression, and his bright, brown eyes and high forehead indicated his quick intelligence. His hair and mustache were of light-brown color, the former worn close cut, and the latter waxed out to a point.

He wore a plain business suit of clothes, stand-up collar, light derby hat, and low-top shoes, a watch and chain, and a tiny diamond scarf-pin.

Except for his mustache, there was nothing duds or sportive in his appearance.

And, least of all, would the ordinary observer have picked him out for a detective.

Yet, such he was, and rated second to none in the West.

Jack Derringer was Eastern born, of honest, hard-working Yankee parents, but had spent the major portion of his life West of the Mississippi River.

His experiences had been varied and exciting; he had tried his hand at numerous business adventures and callings, until he finally adopted the detective profession from choice.

Prior to this he had studied medicine; hence the name "Doc" had clung to him even after he had given up all intention of being a "practitioner."

He was well known and equally feared by the most notable evil-doers in the central tier, and among this class he got the *nom de plume* of Dark-Lantern Doc, or Dark-Lantern Detective, as he usually made his captures under the cover of darkness, and then generally brought a dark, or cap bull's-eye lantern into requisition.

"So you wanted to see me, chief?" Doc continued, after he was seated.

"Yes. The dickens has been to pay in town the last two months, and my men have been simply N. G., although I do flatter myself they're the finest police in the West."

"What's the trouble? You generally have a pretty orderly city."

"I try to, at any rate," the chief replied with commendable pride; "but, for the last month the force might as well have been away on a vacation in Halifax for all the good they have done in stopping these burglaries."

"Ah! it's burglars that's bothering, eh?"

"Yes. There's been no less than fourteen different cases in the past month, and the thing's getting really alarming. The aggregate losses run way up into the thousands, and the neatness and thoroughness with which the work is accomplished shows that we have a perfectly organized band of burglars among us. Last week a stranger in town was arrested on suspicion, but the same day I received this note, and so discharged the fellow."

Here the chief drew a letter from his pocket and gave it to the Dark-Lantern Detective.

It was postmarked and dated "Denver," and ran as follows:

"TO THE CHIEF OF POLICE:—"

"The chap you've got under arrest, under suspicion of burglary, ain't one of us. We, 'The Ducks,' don't employ raw hands or greenies, such as he is.

"Yours truly,

"THE CAPTAIN."

This communication was written on a leaf of paper hastily torn from an account-book, and in the upper left-hand corner a rude attempt had been made to draw the picture of a duck in lead pencil.

"Well, that's cool!" Derringer observed, when he had read the missive. "They are bold in making it known that they are an organization. What do they burglarize after mostly—money?"

"Anything that's portable and of value—money, jewelry, silverware, and silks and laces."

"They must have some place of disposing of these articles."

"Not in Denver, I think, as my men have made a diligent search, without finding the first thing they've stolen. They probably store it at some 'fence' until they've got through here, when they will box it, ship it to some Eastern point, and dispose of it."

"So your men have not been able to make any discoveries, eh?"

"No; nor my own detectives, either."

"Are you acquainted with no fences where stolen goods have heretofore been shovled in?"

"No. I don't know of one. We went for 'em hard three years ago, you know, and broke 'em all up. If there's any in the city now, the force don't know where they are located."

Derringer smiled vaguely.

"Cops don't always give away everything they know," he said. "Your force may be an exception to the general rule, however. Are there not plenty of old-time crooks in the city who would bear watching?"

"Loads of 'em," replied the chief; "but since these frequent burglaries have stirred up the force out of a comparative lethargy, these same old-timers are literally walking in the path of the righteous."

"When was the last burglary committed?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"At the residence of Mr. Sturk, on L—street."

"What was stolen?"

"The silver plate, valued at two hundred, and a hundred dollars that had been locked up in a bureau. The job was done early in the evening, while Mr. Sturk and wife were away at a wedding. On their return, at eleven, they found a window open, and the things gone."

"No servant in the house?"

"I believe not."

Doc Derringer was silent for a few minutes.

"What has become of the notorious 'Duchess,' who created such a splurge a few years ago?" he finally asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"Out of curiosity."

"Well, I believe the bogus duke she is said to have married went to Australia after he skipped from here; anyhow, she remained behind, and is keeping a so-called first-class boarding-house on B—street."

"I always suspicioned that she was more of a crook than the man she cut the swell with!"

"There were plenty who thought the same, but nothing could ever be proved against her."

"Is Joe Daly in town?"

"Yes. I see him occasionally, but he is keeping quiet, and attends church regularly!"

Derringer whistled.

"How does he make his eagles?"

"Oh, I suppose by bucking the tiger. You see, he stands in with the old heads of his congregation, and I suppose some of them like a quiet game now and then. If so, Daly will look out for his board bill all right."

"Well, you want me to see what I can do in the way of mousing this gang?"

"Exactly. Something must be done, and you are exceptionally lucky. I was waited upon yesterday by a committee of prominent citizens, who offered to make it worth while for me to run Pinkerton's men in here and sift the matter out. You see, there are lots of our business men who necessarily carry home large sums of money, after banking hours, and not a few of them live in the suburbs, where the police service is not as strong as it would be were I at the head of the city Government. They lack proper protection, and are beginning to get shaky in regard to their portable possessions."

"Now, I might run a force of Pinkerton men in here, at big expense, and consequently small profit, to—well, say to John Jones, or some other Jones—but I don't propose to do it. I've implicit faith in your ability; so you go ahead and get to work. I'll pay you thrice what I did the last time you worked for me."

"Very well. It's a bargain. I'll give the matter my attention, and if I fail to win, it will be the first time I've done so this year, which is saying considerable. Can you give me a list of all the burglaries, and the articles stolen?"

"Yes. I'll have one prepared for you, and you can have it this afternoon."

"Very good. I'll take a look about town in the mean time. By the way, what ever came out of that Lindsay-Wylton elopement case? Remember it?"

"Yes. Why, I believe Wylton pursued the pair to Chicago, and Lindsay was arrested there for having another wife, and sent up. Anyhow, Wylton brought his girl home again, and since then she is rarely seen, and only then when out riding with her dad."

"Why, confound it, Lindsay never had another wife!"

"I don't believe he did, either, for he was always a quiet, stay-at-home fellow, what I saw of him. But, you know, the old man had a power of money at that time, and money will do

many queer things in Chicago, as well as here."

"Hasn't he a power of it now?"

"Well, that's a matter of individual opinion. You see, he's been sick and confined to his house for two weeks, and has just got out again, and while he was sick there was a rumor about that he was fearfully short on stocks, and it would sweep everything he had to square up with his brokers. However, I've not heard any fresh reports, and presume the matter has been bridged over."

"Very likely. The reason I inquired in regard to the Lindsay affair was because I got a letter out of the post-office to-day, from Lindsay, dated in Chicago over three weeks ago. Here it is. It somewhat explains, in itself."

The chief took the letter and read it.

It ran as follows:

"CHICAGO, July 8.

"MY DEAR DERRINGER:—

"I am coming to Denver to see you on important business. If you get this all right, be sure and hunt me up, providing I don't find you first. Must see you, so look for me. Unless some ill shall befall me, I will be on the principal streets daily. If you fail to find me, make it your point to be sure and find me, as I don't know what may happen."

"Your friend,

"LLOYD LINDSAY."

"An odd letter," observed the chief, as he returned it.

"So say I," replied Derringer. "I don't really feel easy about it."

"Well, one thing is certain," declared the chief, "and that is, Lindsay came to Denver."

"You are sure?"

"Yes. I was at the depot when he came. Let me see: it was just two weeks ago last night and it was raining pitchforks. I saw and recognized him, but he did not notice me."

"Did he take a hotel conveyance?"

"None of the regular ones. He hired a carriage and was driven away."

"Do you know whose rig he hired?"

"No, really, I do not. In fact, I get down to the depot so seldom that I know only the hackmen who have been pulled in for some offense."

"What hour did Lindsay arrive?"

"About half past ten."

"Did you notice if he carried any hand baggage?"

"He did not!"

"Well, I must try and find out what has become of him," Doc said, as he arose to depart, "for he really may have met with foul play. I will also look into this burglary matter with a vengeance. With two jobs on hand, I shall not be idle. So I must be moving!"

And bidding the chief good morning, the Dark-Lantern Detective took his departure.

CHAPTER IV.

TEMPTED TO THE ACT.

THE same forenoon that Doc Derringer dropped in on the Denver chief of police, Henry Wylton sat in his brokerage shop for the first time since the eventful night when his own daughter had shot him in the parlor of his residence.

It had been a painful wound he received in the breast, near the heart, and but for the skill of Dr. La Forge the broker would undoubtedly have died.

La Forge had received only a trifling flesh-wound at the hands of the desperate Hazel, but his thorough fright had caused him to faint, and he did not recover consciousness until Hazel had made good her escape from the house.

As soon as the broker was able to sit up in bed he sent for a private detective, whom he had often employed and knew he could trust, and told him the story of Hazel's attack and flight, and ordered the man to find her; but the restrictions were so great and imperative that the utmost secrecy should be observed in the search that the detective had very little to work upon, and as a result two weeks had passed without the least clue to the whereabouts of the missing girl having been obtained.

And the broker sat in his private office on the morning of which we write, looking very pale and in a decidedly ugly humor.

We have said that he was both a pawnbroker and a money-lender.

The apartment he occupied this morning was handsomely fitted up for a general banking office, where he bought and sold stocks and loaned money on real estate or collaterals.

In a store adjoining was the pawnbroker's shop, where money was loaned on articles of

personal property in sums from ten cents to thousands of dollars, at an enormous rate of interest of course—such as all pawnshops are permitted to extort.

Both of these establishments were owned by Wylton, and he was assisted in conducting them by two expert clerks.

The broker, as we have said, was in a bad humor this morning and eyed Morris, his bank clerk, with a lowering brow.

"So Keegan has not showed up, eh?" he queried snappishly.

"No, sir—not since Thursday," Morris replied respectfully.

"Devilish queer. I supposed the Irish Jew would be nosing around every day. When does the note come due?"

"To-morrow, sir. But, you see, you have the three days' grace."

"Bah! what of that? If I don't succeed in raising the money to pay off that note I am ruined. Keegan was in a tight fix a few years ago, and I helped him out, but bled him. He's got it in for me now, and will show me no quarter. Some scheme must be devised to bridge over this matter, Morris, and you must help me out. Once this note is taken up, I can go on and do business as before. But, what's to be done?"

"I am sure, sir, I don't know. You are very unfortunately situated, 'tis true, and I see no way out of the dilemma," replied Morris candidly, for he fully understood the state of his employer's monetary affairs. "But for that note, we have a good chance to buy and sell to immense profit just now."

Wylton showed his anger and chagrin.

"Just my cursed luck!" he gritted, savagely.

"How much are we behind with our depositors, Morris?"

Morris shook his head dubiously.

"A good ways, sir—into the twenty thousands!"

"Are they getting uneasy?"

"A few have made inquiries, but my assurance that we were sound, and perfectly ready to stand a run, appears to have satisfied them."

The broker was grimly silent for a few minutes, his eyes riveted upon the floor.

"The thought of my ill luck nearly drives me mad!" he said, finally. "A year ago I was worth my million, but now I am reduced nearly to insolvency. Ever since that accursed elopement affair my ventures in business have been nothing but a succession of losses. I have been deliberately fleeced at every turn. May my everlasting curses rest upon Lloyd Lindsay!"

Morris made no answer to this outburst, but went quietly on about his office duties, until Wylton once more addressed him:

"Morris, I tell you something *must* be done to meet this note—something *must* be done. It is now that the pinch comes, but ten days from now I can raise a hundred thousand dollars as easily as to turn over my hand. If we can conceive of some plan to bridge over the present embarrassment, we then have smooth sailing. Now, put your wits together and I'll tell you what I'll do: Arrange so as to meet to-morrow's note, without disturbing what cash we have on hand, and I'll make you my partner, to share equally in future profits of my entire business. Now, that is, you will admit, the offer of a lifetime."

"My credit will be saved, my standing as good as of yore, and I will have no difficulty in securing loans for speculative purposes, where to-day, on the very verge of bankruptcy, I probably could not borrow a thousand dollars on my paper. To-morrow's crisis once passed, friends will gather around me and shake me by the hand. But, if that bank-note is sent to protest, I am irretrievably ruined!"

Morris laid aside his work, and took a seat near his employer.

"You say you can raise one hundred thousand in ten days?" he queried.

"In fifteen, at the furthest!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

"Well, before I make any suggestions, let me know how you propose to raise it!"

The broker was silent a moment.

"It must be confidential," he said.

"Certainly!"

"Well, I'll let you into it. You have, I presume, heard of Clarkson, the millionaire cattle-king?"

"I have."

"Well, the story goes this way: From boyhood to manhood he and I were chums and steadfast friends. When we became of age, I announced my intention of marrying, while he declared that he should remain a bachelor un-

til he accumulated a million of dollars. He exacted from me a promise, however, that if I had a daughter of marriageable age, when he was forty, I should give her to him for his wife, and he was to pay me in hand one hundred thousand dollars, the moment they were duly engaged.

"Strange proposition, was it not? but true, all the same.

"I modified the matter in this much—that, when my daughter—if I was ever so fortunate as to have one—should reach the age of twenty, Clarkson should have her, on the payment of the stipulated sum. He agreed to this, and papers were formally drawn to that effect.

"Just six years ago, when Hazel was fourteen, we met Judge Clarkson, and he was greatly attracted by Hazel's beauty, and obtained of me the date of her twentieth birthday—which is two days hence—and said he would be on hand to complete the contract within a few days after the specified time.

"So, you see, all I've got to do is to wire Clarkson, and as soon as he arrives I shall have a hundred thousand in hand!"

"But Hazel—how about her?"

"All correct. Since her unfortunate escapade with Lindsay she has repented her rash act, and the prospect of being a millionaire's wife has caused her to consent to the alliance!"

"But women are as uncertain as a patent-medicine almanac!" Morris observed, dryly. "What assurance have you that she will accept this cattle-king when she sees him?"

"The assurance that she gave me her promise, and is now at work upon her wedding trousseau!"

"Then, if we can get a loan of enough money to satisfy Keegan's note, you can surely repay it within fifteen days?"

"Yes, positively!"

Morris ran his fingers through his hair reflectively.

"Let me see!" he said; "the note, with interest, amounts to forty-three thousand dollars!"

"Yes. Just forty-three thousand dollars, tomorrow, at noon!" Wylton replied, eagerly.

"Well," said Morris, "if you are sure you can repay the loan in fifteen days, I will tell you how you can get it. You have heard of my uncle, George Clancy?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is quite wealthy, and does a large amount of business with the — National Bank. His paper is always negotiable there."

"But—"

"Hold on. Before I came to work for you, I used to assist him, and learned several important facts, which, if I were of a villainous turn, I could use to advantage. Now, when he draws up a note, for instance, he uses a certain peculiar style of paper, which is manufactured expressly for him, for note purposes. The bank knows this paper, and would pronounce a note bearing his signature on any other sort of paper a forgery!"

"Well?"

"Well, before leaving his employ, I procured some of this paper, and a number of his canceled notes. You are an excellent penman, and if you like, you can make Clancy's note for fifty thousand dollars, go and sell it at the bank, get your money, and you're all right, providing you can take up the note again in a couple of weeks' time. Clancy is in the East, and may not return before fall, and by that time, if you promptly take up the note, the matter will have passed out of the bank's mind, and Clancy will never hear of it!"

Wylton looked astounded.

"Commit forgery!" he gasped—"I?"

"Well, you can do as you like about it," Morris coolly replied. "I have outlined the way for you to get out of your present embarrassment, and you can now go ahead and do as you please!"

"But the danger! It is preposterous to suppose that the bank would cash a note for such an amount, and give me chance to take it up again without suspecting fraud!"

"The bank is organized to make money. They are not supposed to care who gives the note so long as they make a dead sure margin on it!"

"But, did Clancy ever make a note for such a sum?"

"Frequently. He is constantly buying and selling stocks, cattle and property, and I remember one occasion where he gave a total stranger a note for seventy-five thousand, for a big tract of mining property, and the stranger went to the bank and sold it at a discount. Not long after, in the way of a business transaction, another man went to the bank and took up that

very note. Clancy has a huge bank deposit, and owns an immense amount of real estate, so the bank has no fear.

"The way for you to do is, say, to make the note for one year, dated a month back, and in the sum of sixty thousand dollars. Go to the bank, present the note, and tell them you are cramped for money, and want forty thousand on it for fifteen days, with the privilege of taking it up again for forty-three or five. You bet you get the money on it. The interest on the note alone for one year at the regular rate, ten per cent., amounts to six thousand dollars, so the bank would naturally suppose you would be willing to sacrifice a small portion of the interest for a temporary loan!"

"Morris, you're a brick!" Wylton exclaimed, his face beaming with a new-born hope. "I've half a notion to adopt the suggestion, for it looks feasible that the thing may work all right!"

"It's sure to work," Morris replied. "A man of your heretofore exceptional moneyed standing, would never be suspected of stooping so low as to commit a forgery; besides, the paper itself is a guarantee of the genuineness of the note, providing you can imitate my uncle's hand."

"Let's see his chirography!"

Morris took a wallet from his pocket, and extracted several canceled notes, which he had extracted from his former master's papers.

Wylton examined them critically.

"The hand is an easy one to imitate," he observed, "and I can do it. Give me the paper."

Morris did so.

It was of note size, of pinkish color, and contained a water-line stamp of a curious character. The paper was perfectly blank, making it necessary to execute the note entirely in writing.

Wylton went to his private desk and busied himself for fully ten minutes.

He then returned, and handed the note he had executed, and the canceled ones, to Morris.

The latter uttered an exclamation of surprise as he beheld the result.

"Beautiful!" he said. "Clancy could not conscientiously swear, himself, in court, that was not his writing. You need have no fears that the bank will lock twice at that note, sir."

"Well, I am going to put the matter to a test!" Wylton declared, grimly. "If I win, I win. If I don't return you'll know I've lost!"

"No fear but what you will return," Morris assured.

The banker then folded the note, wedged it into his wallet, among other papers, took his hat and left the office.

He was about to play a game that would class him among the most daring of American forgers!

He entered his private equipage and drove direct to the — National Bank.

When he passed into the bank he was recognized by the cashier, who nodded pleasantly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Wylton!" he saluted.

"What can I do for you, to-day?"

"Ahem! Why, Mr. Miles, I have a note here, drawn in my favor by George Clancy. I happen to be a little short, and Clancy being out of town, I thought perhaps you could assist me a little."

"Very likely," Miles replied, taking the note, and looking at it with simply a nod. "Do you wish to dispose of the note, sir?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I am only temporarily embarrassed, until I can dispose of some stocks, and would like to get about forty thousand, with the privilege of taking back the note fifteen days hence, and paying a premium of say a couple of thousand."

"I will see what we can do for you!" and Miles vanished through a door communicating with an inner room.

Soon he returned.

"We can help you out," he said, "by giving you part notes and our check on the First National for the balance, but shall have to ask you three thousand on redemption."

"Very well," Wylton replied. "Any shelter is welcome in a storm."

The contract was executed without delay, and in twenty minutes Henry Wylton left the bank, with a feeling in his heart that, although he had succeeded in a daring attempt, he was one of God's greatest sinners.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

LLOYD LINDSAY and Doc Derringer had been quite intimate friends up to the time Lloyd had eloped with Hazel, after which Doc had heard nothing of his friend up to the day of his arrival in Denver from Georgetown, when, on inquiring

for mail at the post-office, he had received Lloyd's singular epistle.

The two young men had been acquainted from the time of Lindsay's first arrival in Denver, and Doc had never known his friend to show favor to any woman except Hazel Wylton; hence he was greatly surprised at the news the chief of police had given him concerning the separation.

That Henry Wylton had unscrupulously concocted a scheme to wrest away his daughter, by hiring a woman to swear she was Lloyd's wife, and thereby make him out a bigamist, was only too apparent to the shrewd detective.

Doc, therefore, felt deeply concerned when he left the office of the chief of police.

"Lloyd came to Denver two weeks ago on important business," he mused, "and has not been seen since. In his letter to me he seemed to infer that it was highly probable he might fall into trouble and would need assistance."

"I surmise his coming to Denver was to regain possession of Hazel. If so, on his arrival here, did he go to the Wylton mansion in quest of her? I rather argue not. According to the chief's statement, the night was a fearfully stormy one, and the hour of his arrival late. So it is not probable he struck out for the Wylton residence before morning. He wanted to see me on important business, says the letter, and he may not have gone near Wylton's at all."

"Now I intend to find out what has become of the fellow, but, wheream I to begin? I might go to the Union Depot and there make inquiries, but the chances are ten to one that I'd have my trouble for my pains; there are so many roads centering there, that it would be next to impossible to ascertain which train he arrived on, or which of the multitude of hacks he chartered."

"I might search the city hotel registers, but that would take a good deal of time, and there again I would likely enough have my trouble for my pains. I might go to Wylton's and inquire, but the chances are large I would get no satisfactory information."

"Now under such circumstances, what the dickens is a fellow to do, anyhow?"

While walking along he deliberated carefully, and finally resolved to visit the Union Station first, and take a look around.

With him to think was to act, and he accordingly set out.

When he reached the station he scrutinized the surroundings with a critical eye.

There was the usual motley array of conveyances on the stand, awaiting the arrival of the train, but among the goodly number of hacks and drivers, how was he to know which one to select for the information he desired?

Before attempting any questioning, he entered the depot, and began an investigation about trains, and found there was but one train by which Lindsay could have arrived in Denver in the evening, from Chicago. This train was due at 8:10 P. M. By inquiry, he learned that, on the evening of Lindsay's arrival, this train was two hours and twenty minutes late, which brought Lindsay into Denver at half-past ten, according with the chief of police's statement.

"So far so good," Doc muttered. "Things may pan out a little easier now."

He left the depot, and just outside the entrance, he espied a character whom he knew and resolved to accost—a little, dumpy, dirty-faced urchin, with bow-legs, and as homely a phiz as you well could imagine; a bootblack, by the way, clad in ragged raiment, stogy boots, and a cap two sizes too large for him.

This was "Banty," so called on account of his short stature, although fully sixteen years of age.

Banty was one of the "characters" of Denver—a saucy, sharp-witted, wide-awake lad, a regular hustler at his business, and noted all over the Colorado metropolis for his natural-born "ailing" of prying into others' business.

Withal, he was a jolly, good-natured gamin, big-hearted to a fault, and no one could find any great cause to dislike him.

He would banter a person into a passion often, and then laugh him into good nature again.

Those who once heard his hoisterous but musical laugh, would not readily forget it.

The moment he saw the detective he made for him post-haste.

"Hillo! Doc! Why, bless yer hyes, 'ow you is! Whar yer bin? Whar d'ye come from? Ye'r lookin' like ye fell off a Christmas tree. My! but how dusty them quirts o' yours is! Shine 'em up fer you?"

For Banty had a tongue for business as well as for bandy; he had graduated at his "trade" in the slums of New York, rode to Denver in a

freight-car, could talk Dutch, Irish and "Injun," and was, in more than one respect, a remarkable lad.

The vicinity of the depôt was Banty's individual domain, and woe be to the other artists of his line who dared to encroach upon his "stake-out!"

"Come, Doc, let me shine 'em up," he continued, before Derringer could give answer. "Them aire pontoons o' yours do look too sick for supper—luk like ye'd bin tryin' yer hand at street-cleanin' with yer hoofs. Give ye a patent-leather shine for a quarter, an' go it velvet-like over yer bunions!"

"Yes, Banty, you can polish 'em up," Doc replied, "but, come one side, here, for I want to have a talk with you while you work."

"Wanter talk, do you? Well, now, looker here: When customers want me ter work my jaw durin' a shine, I allers takes 'em a quarter extra, but, seein' et's you, I will break the rule, for once."

They removed to some little distance from the main entrance to the depôt; then Banty got upon his knees and began to tackle one of Derringer's dusty shoes with his brushes.

"Now, sail in, Doc," he said, "if you wantar talk, but, please rem-mber there's a limit to human endurance, and I don't wantar be talked to death over a one quarter-shine."

"No danger of that," Doc replied. "I simply want to ask a few questions."

"Oh! of course. I know'd that, afore ye told me. Every chap I shine has from one to a hundred questions to ask, an' some o' the silliest ones—they'd make ye sick to yer stomach. One feller, t'other day, wanted to know how high them mountains, off yonder, *growed!* Just think of it! But, go ahead. Set yer music-box to jinglin'!"

"Well, what I wished to ask you is, do you remember the stormy night, just a week ago?"

"Do I? Well, I reckon! It were a reg'lar sockdolager uv a storm, I tell you."

"How long were you about the depôt that night?"

"Till nigh onter midnight. It rained so hard I couldn't walk hum, 'thout soilin' my broad-cloth, an' I hadn't tuk in 'nuff to hire a copay, so I kept in out o' the wet."

"You were here, then, when the Eastern train arrived?"

"Guess I was."

"Did many passengers arrive?"

"Mighty few."

"Well, on that train, there came a young man, some twenty-three or four years old, with brown mustache. He carried no hand-baggage; hired a hack, and was driven away. Do you remember the party?"

"Dunno as I do. Lemme see!" and Banty ceased polishing, and assumed a wise look.

"He took a hack, you say?"

"Or a close carriage, perhaps."

"Had no luggage?"

"No!"

"Dunno. It mought 'a' been the feller who tuk Jimmy Gilligan in. Most o' the passengers tuk the 'bus fer the States!"

"What of the fellow who took Jimmy Gilligan in?" Doc demanded, eagerly.

"Why, ye see, some feller got Jimmy to drive him away up-town, some'eres, an' told Jimmy ter wait a bit for him. Jimmy waited an hour, till he got soakin', an' then come back, a-swearin' forty to the second!"

"Ah!" and Derringer's eyes sparkled with excitement. "Point me out which hack Gilligan drives?"

"Number twenty, over there, is the one he did drive, but he don't drive it no more."

"He don't?"

"Nixy."

"Why not?"

"Dunno. He only driv one day, after that night; then he laid down the lines, and went up on — street an' bought out a saloon. Ye orter see the lugs he puts on now—dresses like a reg'lar dude, an' ye'd think he owned the town."

Derringer uttered a whistle, expressing surprise, and closed one eye reflectively.

"Do you know where this saloon is, Banty?" he asked.

"Yas, I do."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. You show me where it is, and I'll give you a dollar."

"Bargain, boss!" the bootblack replied. "I'm snappin' up all the dollars I can get hold of, these days. Wait till I shine up this other toboggan, and off we go like a fire-cracker!"

It did not take long for the precocious youth to do that, and when the job was finished, the two set out for Gilligan's new saloon, which was some distance up-town.

On the way, Derringer surveyed his stumpy companion thoughtfully.

"Banty," he said, finally, "how would you like to be a detective?"

"A what?" and the bootblack looked astonished.

"A detective, like myself?"

"Me, a detective?"

"Exactly."

"An' git all the toughs down on me, an' run the chances o' gettin' my cranium stove in? Waal, no—I ruther guess not, Doc, me daisy!"

"Nonsense! No danger of that. The part you would play would be that of a spy—my helper, in a secret way."

"An' would I carry a rewolavor, an' all that sort o' t'ing, an' go spookin' around with a dark-lantern, like yourself?"

"Perhaps."

"Not any for me! I can make more a-polishin' cowhides. Sides that, I'd never make a detective. My tongue's hung on a pivot an' works both ways, so I'd be just as likely to let the cat out o' the bag as not!"

"But you'd have to learn to hold your tongue—learn much and say little. I want a lad of about your caliber, to assist me in some clever work. You are smart and trusty, and I can work you in satisfactorily."

"Oh, cheese it! Don't flatter me like that, or you'll make me blush. What ye want a feller to do?"

"Oh, I'll give you instructions by and by."

"What's the pay?"

"A dollar a day."

"Hub! Kin make more than that blackin' boots!"

"Very likely. But the detective profession often yields big pay at the end of jobs well done. Besides, in working for me, you need not altogether abandon your own business; that'll be part of my plan."

"Well, I'll take a chaw an' think about et," Banty said, reflectively. "Maybe I'll go ye."

In due time they reached Gilligan's new place of business.

It was a rather respectable-looking rummery, on the exterior, having been newly painted, and was in a good neighborhood.

Bidding Banty remain on the outside, Doc entered the saloon.

Here, as outside, all was newly painted, and the back of the bar was a glittering array of bottles and glasses, reflected in mirrors.

A red-faced Hibernian in white duck coat presided behind the bar. Customers there were none visible.

"Mr. Gilligan in?" Doc inquired, advancing to the bar.

"I'm the man," replied he in white duck.

"Ah! I'll try a glass of ale, if you please," Doc said affably, as he laid down the change.

"Recently bought this place, did you not?"

"Only had it a trifle over a week," was the response.

"Let me see," said Doc, as he sipped; "I've seen you before, somewheres. Oh, I have it. You formerly drove a hack at the depôt."

"Sure of it?" Gilligan demanded rather insolently.

"Positive!" Derringer replied, coolly.

"Well, what of it?"

"That remains to be told," was the response.

"Do you know me?"

"No!"

"Well, I am a detective. My name is Derringer."

The ex-hackman stared.

"Well, what do you want here?" he demanded.

"That depends upon circumstances. If I get the information I want, well and good. If not, I may have to invite you to accompany me to the captain's office."

"Now listen, and I'll make known my business."

"A week ago to-night a heavy rain-storm swept over this city. The Chicago train did not reach Denver until half-past ten. Among its passengers was a young man, who had no luggage. He hired your conveyance, and was driven away. You took him to a certain place and let him out, he bidding you wait a few minutes for him. You waited until tired, and drove back to the depôt without him. Now, where did you take that gentleman to, my friend?"

Gilligan looked belligerent.

"I dunno's I'm obliged to answer that question. That's ag'in' the rules of hackmen," he growled.

"You will find it to your interest to give me a straight answer," Doc replied, decidedly. "You know who I am, and I know who you are. You

took that young man to some place, and he has never been seen nor heard from since!"

"He hasn't?" in unfeigned surprise.

"No. So you see you will be required to tell where you left him, whether you want to or not."

"Well, I suppose I might as well save myself trouble," he said, finally. "I drove him to the entrance of a fashionable up-town gambling-house. He told me to wait a few minutes. I waited an hour, got disgusted, and returned to the depôt."

"This place—where is it?"

"Number —, — street."

"Did he owe you hack-fare?"

"Yes."

"Did you return for it next day?"

"N—no. I was too busy."

Doc Derringer leaned against the bar, and looked the ex-hackman straight in the face.

"Gilligan, you've not told me the truth!" he said.

"Take care!" cried the fellow. "Don't you call me no liar, or I'll smash ye! I don't swaller that, from no man!"

"Bah! I'm not afraid of you!" Derringer replied without budging from the bar. "I say you did not tell the truth. I know now where you took your passenger."

"Ye do, eh?"

"You bet! You drove him direct to the residence of Henry Wylton on — street. He entered the house, but came not out again. The next day you went around to inquire in regard to your pay!"

Gilligan glared savagely at the detective, but made no answer.

"At the Wylton residence," pursued Derringer, "it was not wanted known that your passenger came there the night before. You were given a fat sum to hold your tongue. With the money you bought out this gin-mill, and, forswore hack-driving. Quite right, Mr. Gilligan. You look far more at home behind a bar than on a driver's seat. That's all, Mr. Gilligan. Much obliged for your confidence. Take care of yourself. Tal' ta!"

And with an exasperating laugh Doc strode from the saloon just in the nick of time to escape being hit by a beer glass that was hurled after him.

"Located!" our detective mused when out of doors. "Lloyd Lindsay was sensible in sending me that letter. He is indeed in trouble, and Doc Derringer is just the friend to help him out. I never had the pleasure of forming the acquaintance of Mr. Henry Wylton, but by the eternal, he is playing a bold game!"

The Dark-Lantern Detective had not gone wide of the truth; it was a bold game, but a bold man-hunter had struck the trail!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOOTBLACK'S REVELATION.

"WELL, boss, how'd yer make out?" Banty the bootblack inquired when he was joined by Doc Derringer. "Find out what ye wanted to?"

"Yes, I did. The man who took Gilligan's hack was the very person I was inquiring about. Now, Banty, what do you say about joining me, and learning to be a detective?"

"Can't do it, Doc. Sorry to refuse an old friend like you, but it's simply an impossibility."

"And how so, pray?"

"Waal, I've struck another job!"

"Since when?"

"Since you went into Gilligan's."

"Indeed? Let's hear about it."

"Well, it won't take long to explain. You've hear'n tell of Hanky Wylton the broker?"

"Yes! yes! Go on!"

Doc was now greatly interested.

"Well, ye see," pursued Banty, "me an' Hanky aire purty well acquainted, and he sorter cottons to me like a fly ter 'lasses candy. I've run a good many errands fer him, ye see, an' did 'em so sque-gee that he takes a lot o' jar stock in me."

"Well, he passed the saloon a bit ago, and seein' me, wanted to know what I was doin' there? I told him I was waitin' for a chem. He then axed me if I wanted a steady job that knocked bootblackin' silly, and I told him I were allus open ter propersishuns. He told me, then, that he had discharged the nigger coon what uster be his bell-boy, and wanted another boy to fill the vacancy. He axed me if I knew enough to keep my mouth shut, mind my own business, and not go pryin' around."

"I insured him that I war as clam-like as an oyster, and no more in the habit o' spyin' around."

than a snail. This seemed to please him, and he said if I'd come to work for him, he'd dress me up like a major, an' all I'd have to do would be to answer the door-bell, and eat with the cook. Jest think uv it!—the hull pantry at my command!"

"Well, what did you tell him?"

"I told him I'd take the persish. Sech a job, indoors, at sech pay, ain't to be sneezed at."

"How much did he offer to pay you?"

"Ten cases a week, an' I'm to report to-night, at six!"

"Good! You go to work for Wylton, and do as I tell you, and I'll pay you ten more!"

"What?"

"Just as I say. Of all places, Henry Wylton's house is just where I want you to do work for me!"

"Lordy! What kind o' work? You've got me all mixed up worse than a Chinese puzzle!"

"Well, there's a dark mystery about that house, and I want you to nose it out for me. But, before I let you into the business, you must promise me to keep sacred all I tell you, and to try to ferret out the mystery and keep me informed of all you discover. If you succeed, it will be a big feather in your cap—worth a great deal more to you than ten dollars a week!"

"Correct! I give you my promise, and when Banty the bootblack makes a promise he allus keeps it!"

Accordingly, as they walked along, Doc Derringer advised his young pupil of what was necessary for him to know. He began by telling him of Hazel Wylton's elopement with Lloyd Lindsay, how Wylton had caused Lindsay's imprisonment and had brought Hazel home. Also, about how Lindsay had come back to Denver, gone to the Wylton residence, and had not been seen since.

"Now, your work," explained Derringer, "is to ascertain if Lindsay is not a prisoner somewhere about those premises. I believe he is, but don't want to make a positive move until I am sure. Do your investigation so cautiously, that not the least suspicion shall be aroused as to what you are up to. Search cellar and garret equally well. Be courteous and dutiful to your employer; even humble yourself to gain his confidence. Also, when you can get a private word with Hazel, tell her to drop a letter to Doc Derringer, Denver post-office, appointing a private interview with an old friend who wishes to see her. Keep your eyes and ears open on all occasions, and forget nothing you see or hear. Before you go to Wylton's, possess yourself of pencil, paper, envelopes, and stamps, and every discovery you make notify me by mail, at the United States Hotel. If you should find that Lindsay is confined in the house, do not delay, but hunt me up at once! Now, then, can you remember all these things?"

Banty, who had been an attentive listener, nodded.

"Yes, I can!" he said, "an' you bet I'll do the best I kin fer ye, Doc. Shine me all over ef I ain't head over heels interested."

"Don't let your eagerness overbalance your caution!"

"Not much! I'll go about the biz as cautious as a rat, an' ef any chap is in that house I'll know it before I'm there long. There's one thing you're loose on tho', Doc!"

"Why, what?"

"Well, ye see, about that Hazel bizness. Ef I was to foller yer directions she'd quiz me, an' wanter know what I know'd about you, an' I'd have to get up some story, an' et would kind o' look as if I was playin' two parts!"

"By Jove! you're right. I had not thought of that. You're a promising detective already, and I bespeak a bright future. I'll fix that matter about Hazel. After you get fairly installed in your new position, I'll hand you in a letter to give to Hazel on the quiet."

"Now, I guess those are all the instructions I have to give you at present. But, I have a few questions to ask you before we separate. You ought to be pretty well posted up about the crooks of this city."

"Waal, I guess I knows a few of 'em when I sees 'em."

"Just so. Do you know Joe Daly, the cracksman?"

"You bet!"

"And his pals?"

"Not all of 'em."

"What ones do you know?"

"Well, there's Dan Morgan, Daly's best man, when any dirty work is to be done; Frank Stacy, the Leper; Handsome Jim Moran, and Charley, the Swede 'spotter,' what looks up all the jobs!"

"A hard quintette indeed," Derringer com-

mented. "What do you think might be the chances that this gang may be at the bottom of all these recent burglaries that have taken place?"

"Dunno. The perlice hev bin watchin' 'em, but don't seem to suspicion 'em."

"Where does the gang hang out?"

"Dunno about the rest of 'em, 'cept Daly. He's high-toned these times. Boards up at ther fashionable place, No. — street!"

"Ahl with the Duchess?"

"You bet! They go ridin' in a barouche sometimes together ye see. Oh! that's a fly den, you bet!"

"How so?"

"Boardin'-house, you know," Banty said, mysteriously; "meals served at all hours, to transients or reg'lars. The reg'lars knows the racket; the transients, what don't, get a quiet tip, after supper, that, if they keer to, they kin walk up-stairs inter the parlor and see the Duchess's chained Bengal tiger, what she imported from Bengalville or som'eres else. Most o' the boarders have a desire to view the beast, which is kept chained onder a big table, an' the visitors git cluss around the table so as to git a good look at the critter!"

Here the bootblack went off into a boisterous laugh.

"Banty, you're a brick!" Doc declared. "How'd you find all that out?"

"Oh, I cottoned onto it thr'u' some talk I overheard. These plaguey ears o' mine will listen in spite of me. But there's another racket I want to tell you, fore space do us part. I've been sizin' it up, an' you can if you like. See that feller goin' yonder, wid de Prince Albert coat an' black silk hat?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's up to stuff. He goes around to houses what employs Irish servant-gals, an' interdooces hisself as a cuzzin o' Parnell, the Irish aggravator, an' lets on he's solicitin' funds to set old Ireland free. The gals git stuck on him, 'cause he's purty, invites him into the kitchen, an' I'll bet he bleeds 'em fer every cent they've got. Jest to mention it, I seen the same feller go into Sturk's house yesterday, what were broke open last night. Another great peccoliarly o' his is walkin' out to the cemetery and peerin' through the fence at the gravestuns. D'ye cotton?"

CHAPTER VII.

SEES THE TIGER AND FEELS HIS TEETH.

THE house occupied by Mrs. Van Tassel, better known as the "Duchess," was situated on one of the most aristocratic streets of Denver, and was a four-story brick structure with stone trimmings, and quite imposing in appearance.

Few passers-by would have taken it for a boarding-house, for there was no sign on the outside to indicate that it was such.

The Duchess who managed this place, which was run on ultra-fashionable principles, had a history which had given her her Denver notoriety.

Some years before our story, she first made her appearance in the Colorado capital, a ravishingly beautiful blonde, and it was said she came from New York. She was introduced into swell society by a well-known bachelor mining capitalist, and from the outset became a favorite and a belle, and was much sought after. Not only was she beautiful, but she had a faultless education, was a brilliant entertainer, a brilliant musician, a brilliant creature in all respects.

Gossip coupled her name, ere long, in a matrimonial way, with that of the bachelor capitalist who had introduced her into society, but for once Dame Rumor was mistaken. When society was waiting for the announcement of an engagement, a new cavalier burst upon the scene—a Duke Van Tassel from Paris.

A very Adonis, society voted this man, for not only was he a prince among handsome men, but he was talented, and what's more rich—at least he had lots of money and spent it like a lord.

He fairly set society wild.

He was witty and gay.

He boasted in a modest way of his vast French possessions, including chateaus and such.

He was quite as much of an adept at manly sports as he was a favorite in the parlor or ball-room.

So he won friendship at every turn, and not only friendship but confidence. He made conquests among the fair sex by the score, and among them he captured the heart of pretty Ethel Laclede, the then reigning belle.

The poor Colorado capitalist, whom swell society really tolerated only for his wealth, sunk

into utter insignificance, as compared with the charming duke.

The duke's favorite was Ethel.

Together they drove, they gave dinners, they ruled royally everywhere.

The duke's extravagance was enormous. He gambled, gave wine suppers and was the talk of the town. Literally he was lord of all he surveyed.

It was the most brilliant season Denver society had ever known; but the climax came when the duke led Ethel to the altar a blushing bride.

Two weeks—just two weeks afterward, the duke was an inquired-for man.

He had gone, but whither no one knew.

He left the Duchess behind him, but, instead of being bowed down with grief, she did not appear to fret over the desertion, materially.

Business men got together, and there was a grave shaking of heads.

Finally it leaked out that these same business men held checks of large amounts, which they had cashed for the charming Duke, and which were utterly worthless.

It also leaked out that there were some clever and systematic forgeries which the Duke had executed while "doing up" Denver.

Society was shocked—paralyzed!

At first a great deal of sympathy was manifested for the deserted Duchess, which was unsolicited, so far as she was concerned.

Soon after the Duke's departure she purchased the elegant dwelling she now occupied, and appeared to have no lack of money.

Society regarded this fact with suspicious eyes, and hints were not few that it was barely possible that the Duchess had as much to do in hastening the Duke's departure as he had himself—that she had reaped the harvest while he had been forced to flee.

Swell society finally tabooed her altogether, and she fell to the next grade or substratum of fashionables. The tabooing process did not appear to cost her any pique, for she still carried her head high, kept her carriage and servants, and finally converted her residence into a so-called fashionable boarding-house, where we find her, in our narrative.

Gossiping tongues will never become silent, and so it was in the case of the Duchess. After the Duke's flight everybody had something to say about the matter, and she that was Ethel Laclede got credit for being almost anything from an adventuress to a murderess.

But she kept on in the even tenor of her way, apparently unaffected by what others had to say.

Late in the afternoon of the same day that witnessed the events chronicled in our last chapter, a man presented himself at the door of the Duchess's house, and rung the bell.

He was attired in fashionable raiment, wore a shiny silk tile, and patent-leather shoes.

His face was adorned with mustache and luxuriant side-whiskers, and he had the general bearing of a gentleman of leisure.

The summons was answered by a negro bell-boy, in livery.

"Is the lady of the house in?" the stranger inquired.

"Yes, sah!"

"Well, then, go tell her that a gentleman wishes to see her!"

"Yes, sah. Walk into de parlah, sah!"

And the visitor directly found himself seated in a luxuriously furnished double parlor, where a pretty but rather flashily-dressed young lady was engaged in playing upon a piano—an amateur, evidently, for she succeeded in extracting some most soul-agonizing discords from the instrument.

There was a rustling of silks, and the Duchess swept into the parlor—a still wondrously handsome woman of twenty-six, with fair skin, pearly teeth, flashing blue eyes, and blond hair; such a gloriously beautiful creature to gaze upon, indeed, that the stranger felt somewhat awed at her presence.

He managed to arise, and execute a becoming courtesy, however, and in answer to her "Did you wish to see me, sir?" he replied:

"Ahem! yes'm. I was looking for table-board, in the neighborhood, and was advised that I could most likely find accommodations here."

"Yes, sir, I do take some table-boarders," the Duchess replied, surveying the applicant with a critical eye, "but I charge a trifle in excess of the regular boarding-house rates—ten dollars a week!"

"Oh! I am not particular as to the price, as I expect to pay well for what I get in the West. I am a gentleman of leisure, traveling for pleasure, and should probably be with you as

long as Denver held out any attractions for me."

And as he spoke, the gentleman off-handedly drew a large roll of bills from his pocket, extracted a ten-dollar note, and graciously tendered it to the Duchess.

She received it with one of her winning smiles, and said:

"I am sure we shall be delighted to entertain you, sir, while you remain in Denver. My boarders are very select, and no one sets a better table than I do."

To herself she added:

"And I'll make Denver so attractive that you will be in no hurry to leave it!"

"We dine at six, and as it is within a few minutes of that time now, I will escort you to the dining-room, and give you your seat. My arm, please. Thanks. By the way, your name is—"

"Percy Atherton!"

And a few minutes later Mr. Atherton was seated at a long dining-table, one of a dozen other boarders, who had the appearance of being business men and clerks.

During the repast, which was a bountiful one, including fruit and wines, general sociability prevailed, and jokes were cracked and yarns spun, the Duchess now and then joining in with some brilliant repartee.

Next to Percy Atherton sat a young sprig of manhood, with a sallow skin, sunken eyes, and a bit of milky fuzz on his upper lip, calculated to represent a mustache.

During the meal this young man took it upon himself to inform Mr. Atherton that he was a student of zoölogy, and he poured into the new boarder's not particularly interested ear, both comprehensive and non-comprehensive descriptions of the peculiar traits and characteristics of different kinds of animals, winding up with:

"I suppose that you are not aware that our grand hostess, the Duchess, is also interested in zoölogy?"

"I don't know that I was aware of the fact," Atherton replied.

"Well, she is. In the parlor, up-stairs, she has a very rare specimen of the tiger family, which she prizes very highly!"

"Indeed! Is it alive?"

"Yes, indeed! Sometimes it is an exceedingly lively animal, and the harder you pester it the better it is pleased. It is a very peculiar beast, I assure you. If you would like to see it, I will take great pleasure in showing it to you; for I judge you are a traveled man, and appreciate a good thing when you see it."

Mr. Atherton assured Mr. Fitzhugh that he would not mind taking a look at the tiger.

At the close of the meal several other gentlemen expressed themselves of a desire to once more view the attractive animal, and so the Duchess led the way up-stairs to the parlor, where the animal was said to be chained.

The parlor in question covered the entire second floor, being divided only by two rare Turkish curtains.

The front part was lavishly furnished as a parlor proper and wine-room; the rear part as a faro chamber.

This latter boasted of the costliest furniture, table and implements of perhaps any similar room for the purpose, west of Chicago.

The room was brilliantly lit up with a swinging chandelier, and when the party entered was occupied by the faro-dealer, who sat at the table, evidently waiting for custom—a woman nearly as attractive in appearance as the Duchess, and several years younger.

"There, gentlemen, is the tiger," the Duchess announced, as she pointed to the table of the green cloth, "and you may tease him as much as you like. But be careful he don't bite you!"

After which, with a merry laugh, she swept from the room.

The gentlemen took seats at the table, and a game was started, Atherton and the bank standing in winners during the forepart of the evening.

About ten o'clock, all but Atherton and Fitzhugh and the dealer arose from the table, and their places were filled by an entirely different lot of people.

The Duchess was one of the new party; also a tall, gracefully-formed lady, clad in creamy satin, and bedecked with jewels, but whose face could not be seen from the fact that it was hidden behind a white mask that reached to the tip of her chin. Her eyes were brilliant, however, her voice musical, and it was evident that she was young in years.

The others who took seats at the table were men, and Atherton at once noticed that they

were of rougher, more dissipated and less gentlemanly appearance, with one exception, than the players who had retired.

The exception was a flashily-attired man, past thirty years of age, with a most villainously handsome face, keen black eyes, and a sweeping black mustache.

He had the cut of a gambler and a desperate man as well.

Atherton, in whom the reader may have already recognized our detective friend, Doc Derringer, knew this flashy man.

It was Joe Daly the notorious cracksmen, who had committed many offenses and yet succeeded in evading the grasp of the law.

Derringer also recognized in one of the other men a confederate of Daly's named Dan Morgan who was supposed to be accountable for the loss of more lives than any one man in Denver.

A game was at once started, and Daly proposing it should be played on the square, the others nodded.

Derringer well knew, however, that an effort would be made to stick him, come what might, for all the money he had.

He resolved to play for awhile and run his chances.

He had not the shadow of a doubt but what the others all worked together and understood each other perfectly.

The betting was moderate at first but gradually increased in amount, until it was eminently worth while for a player to win.

At one time there was a thousand dollars upon the board which the Duchess tried to scoop in but was prevented by Doc, who raked in the boodle himself.

This caused an exchange of glances among the other male players, and they were glances, too, that boded no particular good to the "Mr. Atherton."

No words were uttered that implied a threat, but the silence that followed seemed to argue that the players were not particularly pleased at the new boarder's fortunate haul, and that they would be still less pleased should he win again.

He did win, however, several times, alternating with the Duchess, while the other players seemed only playing to lose.

The looks of displeasure became more noticeable upon the faces of Joe Daly and his confederate, Morgan, and it seemed that a storm was brewing.

Doc Derringer was not blind to the fact that trouble was impending, but he was perfectly cool and composed, and gave forth no token but what he thought everything was all right.

At exactly twelve o'clock the Duchess arose from the table, over twelve hundred dollars winner, while Mlle. Elise, the dealer, announced that the bank was broken, and the game would necessarily have to be discontinued for the night.

The Duchess then added that, as she had been such a fortunate winner, if the party would adjourn to the next parlor, she would open some wine.

Doc Derringer and the masked woman were the last to rise from the faro-table, and as she passed him the unknown said, in a low tone which did not reach the others, they having passed on into the next room:

"Be on your guard, sir, and leave the house at your first opportunity."

"Why so?" Doc demanded.

"You are suspected, and in danger!" was the reply. "Do not touch heavily of the wine."

Then she passed on swiftly, and when Doc, following her, reached the parlor, she was gone.

Only accepting one of the proffered glasses of wine, Doc announced that it was time for him to be going, and after vainly urging him to remain and help to drink up the wine, the Duchess in person conducted him to the door and let him out of the house.

No effort was made by any others of the company to leave the house at the same time, and so "Mr. Atherton" concluded that the warning of the woman in the white mask was unwarranted.

The hour was so late that no conveyances were at hand, so there was nothing for him to do but go to his lodging on foot.

The night was intensely dark, and his way lay through silent streets, the inhabitants of which had long since retired to rest.

The street lamps gave forth only a dim illumination, and policemen were a thing not to be found for the looking.

Still Derringer had no fear, and strode rapidly along, his mind busied with thoughts of the events of that day and evening.

Most particularly was he thinking of the masked young woman of the faro-table and wondering who she could be, when—

Suddenly his ears caught the sound of stealthy footsteps in his rear.

At the same instant a low voice cried out:

"That's him! That's the cursed spy. Death to him!"

And as he wheeled to confront his followers, Derringer was savagely set upon by three men, one of whom he recognized as Dan Morgan, the tool and confederate of Joe Daly, the cracksmen.

The trio were armed with black-jacks, and they assailed the detective fiercely, uttering savage curses as they did so.

That they meant to kill him without creating any unnecessary noise was only too evident; and the sudden attack was but further proof that they had left the house of the Duchess almost as soon as the detective himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "DUCKS" DEBATE.

THE small hours of the morning were lengthening toward the dawn, when we ask the reader to accompany us to another scene.

In the tpmost garret of one of the oldest tenement-houses in the lower precincts of Denver, a candle burned dimly upon a long, unvarnished table, which at some period of its existence most likely did service as a dining-table.

The room was floored, but was unplastered and unplastered, and the roof slanted down so far on each side that a man could not stand erect, except at the center of the floor, without bumping his head.

At one end was a small, square room, overlooking the street; at the opposite end was a door opening on a landing from which a steep stairway led to the floor below.

The only furniture of the garret besides the table was the half-dozen wooden chairs surrounding it, which were occupied by as many men.

Of the number present we recognize four whom we have previously introduced, namely: Joe Daly, Dan Morgan, Henry Wylton, the broker, and the young man in a Prince Albert coat, whom Banty the bootblack pointed out to Doc Derringer as being a collector of cash for the Farnell cause.

A fellow with more than ordinary good looks he was, with soft, effeminate complexion and features, mild blue eyes and hands as small and white as a woman's.

Faultless in regard to dress, there was nothing in his appearance to give any one cause to suspicion him for a crooked character.

The other two at the table were tough-looking customers, whose faces expressed the hard lines of their natures, and stamped them as men of few if any scruples.

The sextette, as they sat about the table in the dim candle-light, seemed more in a serious than a humorous frame of mind.

"Well, perhaps you are right, Wylton said, in answer to some previous remark of Joe Daly. "A man named Gilligan told me to-night that this Derringer is back in the city nosing around, and if you are sure that it was he who visited the Duchess to-night, we have cause to be alarmed. He is one of the grittiest sleuth-hounds in the West, and has the reputation of never taking hold of a job but what he wins it!"

"Well, I'm sure it's Derringer," Daly declared. "I saw him leaving the office of the chief of police yesterday, but afterward kept out of his sight. Last night when he visited the Duchess's in disguise, I knew him at a glance. When he left, I, Morgan, and Handsome Jim were hot on his trail and tried to black jack him. But, the cuss evaded our blows and knocked the three of us down, and escaped. Not, however, till I had succeeded in tearing the false whiskers from his face and recognized him. There's no doubt in my mind but what he suspects us of being the Ducks, and means to try to run us down!"

"I should have supposed that three men of your caliber would have got away with a single man!" Wylton growled, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"We didn't, all the same!" Daly replied. "The detective is a regular Samson for strength, and quicker than chain-lightning with his fists. If you don't believe it tackle him some time, and he will convince you."

"Thanks, I have no desire to bother with the fellow!" the broker declared. "If he comes bothering me, I'll find a way of getting rid of him."

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend," Daly replied, coolly. "If I am not greatly in error,

you are as likely to be disturbed by this detective devil as we are."

"How do you make that out?" Wylton demanded.

"In this way: Derringer and Lloyd Lindsay were warm friends. When Lindsay returned to Denver, to reclaim his wife, it is probable that he, not knowing what peril might befall him, notified his friend of his purpose. I don't know why Derringer visited Gilligan, for you haven't told me, but I should presume that since it was Gilligan who drove Lindsay to your house, Derringer called upon him to make inquiries as to Lindsay's whereabouts!"

Wylton scowled.

"Well, he didn't find out anything!" he declared, gruffly. "Gilligan knows better than to give me away, you can bet! I'm not afraid of what this detective can do to me, personally, but if he is really working to nab the gang, it is better that the gang should scatter for the present, as it will be dangerous to attempt to do any more business, with such a detective on the trail."

"That's what I say," Daly agreed. "I've done all the time I care to behind the bars, and I say sell the swag and divide the proceeds, before we get broke up by the law. What do you say, Handsome Jim?"

"I say no!" the effeminate young man in the Prince Albert declared, with emphasis. "It's out of the question. In the first place, we have no market for the goods yet, and it would be dangerous to try to remove and dispose of them if we had, since the police are watching us. Besides that, all arrangements have been perfected for making the haul out of old Myers, who keeps his boodle in his house, and I'm not in favor of giving the go-by to such a snap as that. All we've got to do is get rid of this Derringer, and there's nothing to hinder matters going on as usual, for the police have long since given up suspecting us!"

"Of course," chimed in Dan Morgan, while his two companions on the right gave grunts of assent. "It's all nonsense to think o' disbandin', when we've only got fairly to workin'. What money we get is payin' our expenses all right, and there's no use of divvyin' on the other stuff until we've got enough to make it worth while. The Myers crib orter show up a thousand in cash, at the least. The way to do is to trap this fellow, Derringer, and do him up. Then we've no fear from the police. They're too slow to catch us. If this galoot, Derringer, war put out o' the way, we could work this town till winter, and then emigrate!"

"Well, who's goin' to do the detective up?" Daly demanded, with a sneer. "I don't want any such job until I'm forced to do it."

"Nor I," chimed in Wylton. "Still I'd be willing to pay well if the fellow were dead, as I'm not partial to detectives."

"I shouldn't think you would be, just at present," Morgan observed, dryly. "If Lindsay—"

"Saut up!" the broker growled. "Don't you know anything at all? There's no telling who may be listening!"

The villain, plainly, was quite nervous.

The others laughed at the idea of there being listeners at that hour, and especially considering the out-of-the-way location of the room.

"Well, if you want the fellow put out of the way bad enough to make it worth while, why, come and see us!" Morgan said.

"Here's Stacy, an' Charley the Swede, and myself, as wouldn't be afraid to draw lots to see who took the sum and did the job."

"I'll give a hundred dollars!"

"Bah! I wouldn't touch the job less'n five, for my part!" Morgan declared.

"Nor I!" declared Stacy and Charley the Swede, simultaneously.

"Well, I'll give five hundred dollars, when I am convinced that Doc Derringer is put safely out of the way!" Wylton assured. "So draw your lots, and the sooner the job is done the sooner it will be safe to resume operations. In the mean time, I may add that I shall go East ere long, and if you fellows are anxious to dispose of the goods, I will take all risks and give you ten cents on a dollar for the lot!"

"Well, I guess not!" Handsome Jim spoke up, he seeming to have authority. "The goods don't go for no such sum. We'd be a lot of fools to dispose of the truck at any such a sacrifice. If we can't net fifty per cent. of real value we'd better give up business. You want too much of a snap, Wylton."

"Well, I can't offer any more," was the reply. "Money is money, you know, and the goods ain't easy to convert into money."

No one seemed inclined to dispute Jim's author-

ity as concerning the sale of the goods, and so the subject dropped.

Morgan, Stacy, and the Swede now drew lots, to see who should "lay for" Doc Derringer, and put him out of the way.

The choice fell to Morgan, who seemed delighted that it should be his opportunity to earn blood-money.

The Ducks then held a final debate on the matter of continuing the burglaries which had been so successful in the past, and a decision was arrived at in the affirmative, and the next trial was set for the following night, when the house of a wealthy old miner, named Myers, was to be made the victim.

After plans for this raid had been discussed the party broke up, and the little garret was left in darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

ARRIVAL OF THE JUDGE!

THE next forenoon saw Henry Wylton once more sitting in his broker's office in apparent deep thought. Morris, formerly his clerk, but now his partner, was not present, but was most likely soon expected, for the broker occasionally glanced toward the door.

Wylton was still looking pale and haggard from the effects of his recent illness, and wore a more troubled expression of countenance than was his wont.

"There's no use in denying that I am in a bad way," he mused. "That this detective is in search of Lindsay there can be no doubt, else he would not have visited Gilligan's and made the inquiries he did, not to mention charging that Lindsay was brought to my house."

"What I marvel at is, that, suspecting as much as he does, he has not paid me a visit. Then, too, unless Morgan succeeds in putting him out of the way, there's danger of his breaking up the gang and discovering my connection with it. That forged note on Morris's uncle worries me also. If not taken up soon there may be the deuce to pay. I'm menaced from all directions it seems, and must stand in fear and trembling, at least until Doc Derringer is gotten rid of. The gang are all right, unless it is Handsome Jim Moran, whom I've little confidence in. Nor have I much in the Duchess. Since my refusal to longer visit her house, I've no doubt but what she has a grudge against me. To be sure I might do worse than to marry her, as she wishes me to do; but I don't care to take on any more incumbrances of that sort. As soon as I get hold of Clarkson's money, about the most likely thing for me to do will be to skip for Canada, and settle down at my ease. Once out of the States, I am at least safe from molestation for debt or any other difficulty!"

Thus mused the broker, as he moodily sat staring at the floor.

His reflections were interrupted, however, by the entrance of Morris, who was attired in a new suit, and was unusually spruced up.

"Well?" Wylton demanded, interrogatively, "what's the news, Morris? I've been anxiously awaiting your return."

"Oh! I took up the bank-note all right, so there's no more trouble to be feared about a foreclosure. The trouble lies entirely in another direction!"

"What do you mean? Speak out; do not keep me in suspense!" Wylton cried, quickly and nervously.

"Well, I've got a letter from my uncle, and he expects to arrive back in Denver to-morrow, or next day at the furthest. Hence I shall take a vacation!"

"Yes? You'll skip and leave me in the lurch, will you?"

"I must look out for myself. My health is poor, and I need rest. There's no reason why I shouldn't take it now!"

Wylton uttered an oath.

"I'd like to see you go!" he hissed. "You shall stay and face the music with me, curse you!"

"Not muchly!" Morris replied, coolly. "I didn't forge the business, sir. You are the guilty man, and unless you can raise the note before uncle returns, it's your lookout, not mine, whatever happens. To be sure I furnished the paper, and uncle would know that no one else could have done so but me, and he would naturally associate me with the conspiracy to defraud him. Taking it for granted that, should he do so, you would be mean enough to go back on me, and try to throw all the blame on me, you can see why I am so anxious to leave."

"If you attempt to leave, you young bound, I'll have you arrested!" the broker declared, fiercely.

Morris laughed, defiantly.

"Bah! Arrest me if you dare, and I will turn State's evidence, and expose the whole matter, which would send you straight to prison. So do your worst! I take pleasure in bidding you a last farewell. May you live long and prosper!"

And with a triumphant laugh the young villain strode from the office.

With a bitter curse Henry Wylton sprung to his feet, to follow his unfaithful clerk, but, on second thought, he knew it would not do, should he cause Morris's arrest, Morris would, no doubt make the exposure, in accordance with his threat, and it would result in more disgrace than anything else he could do!

In despair, born of desperation, the banker once more sunk back in his chair, almost beside himself with rage and fear.

"No, no! I dare not arrest him!" he gasped. "He indeed has me by the hip, and I am powerless to prevent his flight. If his uncle returns before I can raise the money to redeem that forged note, I am indeed lost. Good God! I believe I shall grow crazy over all this trouble!"

He buried his face in his hands, and thus remained in anguished meditation for several minutes, to be aroused by the sound of a footstep upon the threshold, and looking up, saw a man standing in the doorway, surveying him, inquiringly—a portly, solidly-built person of about Wylton's own age, with a fat, ruddy countenance that beamed with good nature, pleasant brown eyes, and hair and mustache but slightly sprinkled with gray.

Wylton was upon his feet in an instant, and rushed forward with an exclamation of joy.

"Judge Clarkson, as I live!" he cried. "Bless your heart, old boy, I am glad to see you!"

"And I am equally glad to see you," the judge responded, as the two shook hands heartily. "I dare say you were not expecting me, Henry?"

"On the contrary, I have been looking for you for some days," the broker replied. "Come right in and sit down, judge. Upon my word, you are looking every bit as young as when I saw you last."

"Am I? Well, I feel about as young. But, it strikes me you look much older, Henry. You look like a man who had passed through a deal of trouble, and if I mistake not, you were worrying over some trouble, just now, as I darkened your doorway."

"Well, perhaps I was," the broker replied, with a weary sort of smile. "I have had enough business reverses of late to worry any man. But, do not let me intrude any of my troubles on you. I suppose you have come to pay me a good long visit, and I shall try to make you as welcome as the flowers in May."

"Of course you would, Henry. I well know your sociable and generous nature; but, you see, the fact is, I shall be compelled to make my stay very brief this time. I am booked to sail on a European steamer from New York next week, and, in order to catch it, must leave here to-morrow. I intended to come on a few days sooner but was delayed."

"Well, I am sorry for that, for it seems like old times to see you. Do you intend to go to Europe alone?"

"Certainly not. I intend to take my wife with me."

"You are not married?"

"No, but I came to Denver with the expectation of being, you see."

"Ah, yes, I understand. You refer to the old agreement?"

"Exactly. I have long looked forward with eager anticipation for the time when your daughter should become twenty years of age. And I believe the time is about at hand."

"Yes, Hazel is twenty, and one of Denver's handsomest young ladies."

"And how does she favor a union with me?"

"Oh! that's fixed and settled long ago. She is a dutiful child and has a sacred regard for my slightest wish. I told her long ago that I had set my heart on seeing her your wife when she was twenty, and told her of our agreement of years ago. Knowing you to be a worthy and an honorable gentleman, she made no objections to such a union. She has been expectantly awaiting your coming for some time, and—on the quiet between you and me—she has her *trousseau* already prepared. So there will be nothing to prevent your early marriage, which, however, my daughter prefers shall be private!"

"Certainly. I do not approve of publicity either, and, believe me, I am overjoyed to hear that everything is so promising," the judge said,

his ruddy countenance beaming with joy.

"How soon shall I see the dear girl, Henry?"

"To-night, about dinner time. She is stopping with a lady friend a few miles from here on a visit, and I shall have to drive out and get her and give her a few hours' time to prepare to receive you. You can call to-night at six and you will find her waiting for you."

"And you are positive she will accept me?"

"I'll stake my life on it!" Wylton declared, emphatically.

"Very well," the judge replied. "I will stay at the hotel until to-night and then call. If everything is O. K. we will be married in the morning after breakfast. In the mean time, if you are sure that your daughter will marry me, we may as well settle our contract now as at any other time. Let me see: fifty thousand, is it not, I am to pay you?"

"I believe that is the figure," Wylton responded, "and I must say you are getting a good wife dirt cheap, at that. Had I the bargain to make again, even an old coney like you could not have Hazel for double the price."

The judge laughed dryly as he opened a traveling-bag he had brought with him, and took out a large package of bank-notes.

"Well, I'm not squealing at the price," he assured, "although I have not seen your daughter for a number of years. Do you see this package? Well, after I have paid you I shall have enough money left, out of this, to defray a year's traveling expenses in Europe."

"Do you not carry money rather carelessly, considering the amount?" Wylton asked.

"Oh, no. I always carry my money in this manner, and have never lost a cent. Here is your money, Henry, and you may expect me to-night, to claim your daughter as my future wife."

"Very well. You shall not be disappointed. You shall find her in waiting for you."

"I certainly shall expect it," the judge declared, rising. "I will now go to the hotel, and make some needful preparations for the meeting!"

And bidding the broker good-morning, the cattle-king took his departure.

CHAPTER X.

DOC CATCHES ON TO A COON!

To once more turn our attention to Doc Derringer.

As related by Joe Daly, the detective had beat off his assailants in the street attack, and had made good his escape, having received only a few bruises about the head and body.

He made no attempt to arrest the ruffians after felling them successively to the ground, but, considering discretion, in this instance, the better part of valor, took to his heels, and got out of the neighborhood as rapidly as possible.

He made his way direct to Police Headquarters, and had an interview with the lieutenant on duty, relating the particulars of the attack, but, for reasons of his own, mentioned nothing about his visit to the house of the Duchess Van Tassel.

The lieutenant promised to have a quest for Dan Morgan; then Derringer sought the hotel where he had registered on his arrival in Denver.

At early daybreak he was abroad in the lower part of the city, still puzzling his brain over his incompleting task.

In the course of his stroll he came suddenly upon a scene, wherein a policeman was clubbing a negro lad, whom he had found asleep on a doorstep.

Derringer recognized both the cop and the lad, and immediately hurried forward.

"Here! let up at that, McKenna!" he ordered, authoritatively. "For shame, for using the club on a mere boy like that!"

"That the devil's the matter wid you?" the cop growled, scowling savagely at Doc. "I found the young vagrant shlapin' on respectable people's doorstep, an' I'm goin' to pull him in!"

"Are you! Try it if you want to make yourself trouble. The boy's been discharged from work, and having no money or place to go to, had to lie down somewhere. I know him and will be responsible for him. So let him alone."

The officer looked amazed at the detective's apparent gall.

"An' who the deuce are you?" he demanded.

"I'm Doc Derringer. So if you don't want a vacation go along about your business, or I'll have you suspended for clubbing the boy when he wasn't resisting you!"

"I've a moind to crack your skull for yez!" McKenna threatened, belligerent in his attitude.

"Try it on, and there'll be crape on your

door!" Derringer declared, at the same time thrusting his hand toward his hip-pocket. "Now you git, or I'll make it sick for you around here."

The officer, evidently, was not one of the bravest, for he stalked away, but turning every few steps to shake his fist at the detective.

Doc approached the darky, who was about sixteen years of age, small of his age, and well dressed.

"Are you hurt much, bub?" Doc demanded.

"No, sah," the lad replied. "He struck me on de head, an' you know a coon's head is tough, sah!"

The reply caused the detective to laugh.

"Well, it's a good thing to have a tough head sometimes. What's your name?"

"Thomas Jefferson Green, sah."

"Didn't you use to work for Henry Wylton, the broker, Tom?"

"Yes, sah."

"I thought so. Were you discharged?"

"Yes, sah. I got kicked out of doors, sah, an' had to leab widout my pay."

"What did you get discharged for, Tom?"

Thomas looked sheepish and hesitated.

"Answer me!" Doc commanded, a trifle sternly. "I am a detective, Tom, and trying to find out what I can about Wylton and the goings-on in his house. You answer all my questions truthfully and I'll give you a neat little sum of money and help you get another job. What were you discharged for?"

"Well, sah, you see I oberheerd de boss a-talkin' aloud to himself in de parlor, an' it sounded so funny dat I listened. De boss caught me listenin', sah, an' he helped me out of de front door wid his boot."

Derringer's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Tom," he said, "you are the very chap I wanted to meet, and you can doubtless give me much information I ought to have. If I give you a ten-dollar note will you make truthful answers to the questions I shall ask?"

"Deed I will, sah; I'll do de best I can."

"Very well. Come along with me to my room, and when I am done questioning you, you shall have the money, and as much more as your information may seem worth to me!"

They accordingly set out for the hotel, and in half an hour were seated in Doc's apartment, with a table between them.

The detective was not a little elated over his meeting with the young darky, and had reason to believe that he was on the eve of obtaining some valuable pointers.

"Now, Tom," he said, "to begin with, do you remember a fearfully stormy night some two weeks ago?"

"Yes, sah! I does."

"On this night in question, was there a caller at the Wylton residence at a late hour?"

"Yes, sah, dar was dat."

"Who was it?"

"A young man, sah!"

"What did he want?"

"He wanted to see de boss."

"Did he give his name?"

"No, sah. I told him he couldn't see de boss, but he crowded his way into de hall, an' told me if I didn't call de boss he'd break me up. I sent him into de parlor and went and told de boss a gentleman wanted to see him. De boss went down into de parlor an' shut de door."

"Well? What else?"

"Dat's all, till I was in de ante-room, when I heard a yell in de parlor. Den de sick missus she rushed down-stairs an' into de parlor, an' wanted to know where her husband was!"

"Ha! the sick mistress?"

"Yes. She hab little baby an' go out ob her head, so dey had to keep her asleep."

"Go on! go on!"

"De boss tell her her husband hab not been dere. Den she wanted to know where her babe was. He told her it had died. She told him he lied, an' told him if he didn't tell her where her husband and babe was she would shoot him!"

"Go on! What else?"

"Well, de boss wouldn't tell her, an' she did shoot him. Den, she go into de library, put on a waterproof, an' leab de house, sah. It pears, sah, from what I could learn, dat after de baby was born, it was taken off somewheres. Dat night, when de young missus returned to her senses, she missed de baby, an' demanded to know of de doctor what was in her room, what had become of her child. He refused to tell her, an' she stabbed him wid a knife, an' come down-stairs, in time to hear de yell in de parlor. She thought it was her husband's voice, and demanded to know where he was. De boss wouldn't tell her, an' so she shot him, an' cleared out."

"When did she next return?"

"She nebber come back since, sah. De boss hire a private detective to search for her, but she did not come back!"

Derringer looked thoughtful and betrayed his excitement.

"Did the caller leave the parlor before Hazel entered it?" he next asked.

"No, sah, he jist didn't leab de house."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sah, 'cause I was watchin' to let him out. De front door hab a peculiar lock, an' he couldn't hab got out except some one let him out."

"Then, where was he when Hazel entered the parlor?"

"Deed, I don't know, sah. I've been a good deal puzzled 'bout de matter, sah, berry much puzzled, I tells you."

"How many doors open out of the parlor?"

"Only one, sah."

"Is the floor carpeted?"

"Yes, sah."

"Are there any closets in the room?"

"No, sah."

"What happened afterward?"

"Well, de boss was sick, an' come purty nigh kickin' de bucket. De doctor wasn't much hurt, an' he nussed de boss, who just got out of doors for de first time, yesterday, after he bounced me!"

"Were you questioned in reference to that night's work?"

"Yes, sah, an' made to swear, at de point of a pistol, that I'd nebber breathe a word of what I had heard, seen, or knew. An' here I hab done gone an' gib it all away, sah! If de boss knew it, he would kill me fur sure."

"Never fear. If I am not mistaken, he will land in jail before many hours. You have served me well, Tom, and I may have still further use for you. There remains but little doubt that Hazel's husband, Lloyd Lindsay, is a prisoner in that house somewhere. How about the cellar?"

"Not very large, but like any other cellar, sah."

"Does it extend under the parlor floor?"

"Nebber took notice, but don't think it do."

"How is the parlor heated?"

"By a stove."

"How high is the pipe-hole?"

"'Bout two feet above de mantel."

"Is the mantel marble?"

"Yes, sah."

"Is there, below the mantel, more mart'le work, that looks as if it might cover the mouth of a fireplace?"

"Yes, sah, I should say dar was."

"How many servants are there in the house?"

"Only de old colored woman an' de bell-boy."

"Well, Tom, that's about all now, unless you can tell me what you overheard Henry Wylton talking about!"

"Dunno as I can tell you in de perzact words, sah, but I'll tell you what I know. You see, one day a good while ago, I heard de boss and Hazel talkin'. De boss tell her dat, years ago, he had promised her, when she got to be twenty years old, to a bery rich man, for his wife, an' dat de rich man was to gib de boss fifty thousand dollars when de weddin' come off. De boss wanted Hazel to promise to marry dat rich man, but she wouldn't do it. She said she should wait till her own husband got out of prison an' then return to him. De boss got fearful mad den an' swore he'd kill her wid his own hands afore she should do dat. Dey used to quarrel about de matter every day."

"Well?"

"Well, what I oberhear de boss sayin' was dat it was time for de judge—dat's de rich man—to come to Denver to claim his bride. Den de boss cussed hisself for lettin' Hazel escape, an' he swore he'd have de judge's fifty thousand dollars, if he had to substitute anodder Hazel in de real Hazel's place. Just den I sneezed, an' he caught me listenin' an' booted me out of doors!"

The interview between Derringer and the darky lasted but a few minutes longer.

Doc had made note of all he had heard, and paying Tom off, he dismissed him, and soon after left the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

WYLTON SECURES A SUBSTITUTE.

AFTER the judge's departure, Wylton sat regarding the roll of money in his hand as one might regard some priceless treasure they expected but were loth to part with.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" he muttered, his brows knitting in thought—"the price of a life,

literally. For this sum I have pledged to give the judge my daughter in marriage, but until Hazel's flight I never expected to be able to carry out my promise.

"Since then matters have changed greatly. Hazel has disappeared; God only knows where she is, and I shall have to palm another off on the judge. If she plays her part well he will never know the cheat, not at least until I am out of his reach. They will go to Europe, and ere they return to Denver, I will be among the missing. There can be no doubt but the plan will work all right.

"The next thing to consider is this money. With it I can redeem the forged note, but the question is, shall I do it? It will take nearly all of this amount, and where shall I ever get this much again? I cannot remain much longer in Denver anyhow, and if I give up this big sum what will I have to leave on? To be sure I can mortgage my real estate for maybe ten thousand dollars, but that is not fifty, by any means. In Canada I could live on fifty like a nabob.

"The question is, when Morris's uncle returns to Denver and visits the bank, will any mention be made to him of the note? Most probably not, since he has been in the habit of giving his note for large amounts. But there's the risk—that accrued risk, and I don't know whether to take it or not. Should discovery be made that it is a forgery, I'd be nabbed quicker than lightning, and there is no way I could plausibly explain how I came into possession of such a note!"

For over an hour the scheming broker puzzled his brain over the problem of whether he should redeem the forged note or not.

At the expiration of that time he left the office and locked the door.

He had succeeded in drawing his conclusion.

Morris's uncle would not arrive in town before to-morrow, anyhow, and so Wylton resolved that there was no danger until then. In the mean time something might turn up.

After leaving his office he went to the office of a brother money-lender, and succeeded in mortgaging his entire estate, both real and personal, for a matter of twelve thousand dollars.

If worst came to worst now, he argued, there was nothing to prevent his leaving Denver at a moment's notice.

He next betook his way toward the outskirts of the city, and in the due course of time paused at the door of a vine-wreathed cottage, which was set apart from any others in the immediate vicinity.

Just outside this cottage two women were seated upon a settee engaged in sewing.

One was a matronly-looking woman of forty; the other a girl of twenty, unusually prepossessing of appearance, and looking remarkably like Wylton's own daughter, Hazel.

The ladies both greeted the broker with pleasant salutations, and the younger one arose and brought him a chair from the cottage.

"Well, Mrs. Baker, how are you getting along?" the broker asked.

"Very slowly, sir, very slowly," the elderly lady replied, with a weary sigh, which evidently was not affectation.

"Blanche and I have to work like slaves all the time to earn our living. I fear, ere long, that we shall have to give up the cottage and go out to housework."

"Oh! I guess not. As long as you keep the child I will not see you suffer."

"You are kind, sir, but with a hard winter ahead matters look pretty gloomy, I can assure you. Blanche is gifted with good musical talent you know, sir, and she has been trying to get an engagement on the variety stage in town, but, thus far, has met with no success. Have you heard nothing from Hazel, Mr. Wylton?"

"No, I have not, Mrs. Baker, nor do I ever expect to. I have settled it in my mind, that, when in delirium she escaped from my house that wild night two weeks ago, she became bewildered and rushed into the river and was drowned."

"Sad! sad indeed. I suppose you have had a very diligent search made?"

"Yes, but it has been very quietly conducted. Few persons are aware to-day that my daughter is not an inmate of my house!"

"Indeed?"

"It may seem strange to you, but it is nevertheless a fact, I have good reasons for wishing Hazel's flight to be kept from the public. If you like I will explain."

"We should like to hear, sir, I am sure."

"Well, this is the way of it: Years ago I pledged my daughter's hand in marriage when she should become twenty years of age to a bosom friend of mine, then a rising young barrister, and now an eminent judge and one of the

richest cattle men in Colorado. To-day he is worth his millions, both in estate and money.

"At the time this bargain was made, a regular contract was drawn up, to the effect that when I should give the judge my daughter Hazel, he was to pay over to me a round sum of money. I will not give you just the figures, but suffice to say that had I the amount now it would come in handy, for I have recently sustained heavy losses in speculation—more than I can accumulate again in years."

"How unfortunate."

"Well you may so. Especially so at the present time. If living, Hazel is now twenty."

"Ah! then you expect the judge to come on to keep his part of the contract?"

"He has already come. He arrived this morning!"

Both ladies uttered exclamations of regret.

"Then he knows of Hazel's flight?" Mrs. Baker demanded.

"By no means. I told him Hazel would be ready to receive him at six to-night, and would marry him to-morrow morning, prior to his departure for Europe!"

"But how can this be, Mr. Wylton, when you do not even know where Hazel is?"

"There's no 'how can it be?' about it. It must be! I must have a substitute to fill Hazel's place! Did I even know where my daughter is, it would do me no good, for she many times has vowed she would never marry the judge. So I must have a substitute to fill her place. I have come here for the substitute!"

Both Mrs. Baker and Blanche looked their astonishment.

"You have come here to find a substitute, Mr. Wylton?" the widow echoed, in tones of immeasurable surprise.

"Just so!" the broker replied, with a confidential air. "I have come here for a substitute!"

"But pray explain yourself, sir. You surely do not mean Blanche?"

"That's just exactly who I do mean. She is young, handsome and talented, and eminently fitted for a better station in life than what she occupies here. By assuming the position of my daughter, to whom she bears a remarkable resemblance, she marries a millionaire, and one of the grandest men whom the sun shines upon. No man knows the judge but to give him credit for being all that is noble and honorable. None know him but to love him. He is worth his millions, and not afraid to lavish money on any one he likes. Blanche is vivacious and of a winning disposition, and would secure his favor much quicker than my own daughter. Not a soul outside of my household knows of Hazel's flight except the detectives. With a few instructions, Blanche could step in and fill the vacancy, and marry a fortune, and no one would ever be the wiser for it. The judge takes his bride to Europe for a year. Imagine the countless pleasures she will encounter. Surely no woman with a mite of sense would think of refusing so brilliant an opportunity!"

Words would be inadequate to express the astonishment of the two listeners to the scheming broker's harangue.

The proposition fairly took their breath away, so to speak, and it was some seconds ere either could utter a word.

Then Mrs. Baker said:

"Surely, Mr. Wylton, you cannot conceive how great is our surprise at your more than extraordinary proposition. It is simply overwhelming."

"And surely you cannot for a moment suppose that I would be willing to part with Blanche, even in consideration of all the inducements you have presented? No, indeed, sir!"

"You need not part with her," Wylton replied. "Before accepting the judge, Hazel could make the stipulation that her nurse must accompany her wherever she went. The judge, knowing that Hazel was brought up a lady, would not think of refusing so insignificant a request. Indeed, I know him well enough to know that he would be willing to supply her with as many maids as she might require. You could easily play the part of nurse, and coach Blanche against making any mistakes. Thus, you would both be provided for during your lifetimes. There could be no danger, as you bear no resemblance to each other in particular."

Surely the picture was tempting enough to set any woman's wits crazy, and mother and daughter exchanged inquiring glances.

"Well, Blanche, what do you think of it?" Mrs. Baker anxiously inquired.

"I think it is the opportunity of a lifetime," promptly replied Blanche, who was ambitious to rise to a higher sphere in life than that she

now occupied. "Here we have drudgery and starvation to contend with; on the other hand, riches and luxury. I'm in for it, without any parley. I can easily play Hazel's part, and I'll jump at the chance."

"Bravo!" cried the broker. "I always knew you were a sensible girl, Blanche, and I admire you for it. A life of happiness lies at your command, and you would be foolish—ay, insane—not to accept of it!"

"But, what will become of the poor little babe?" Mrs. Baker inquired of Wylton—for there were strong humane instincts in the woman.

"Oh! you can remain here at the cottage with it, until to-morrow morning, and then I will send a woman to take care of it."

"For goodness' sake get some one who will be kind to it, Mr. Wylton, for it is a sweet little thing."

"Oh! I'll attend to that," Wylton replied. "And now, Miss Blanche, if you will get ready soon, we will set out for my residence, as there are numerous instructions I shall need to give you before you meet the judge."

Accordingly the girl arose and entered the cottage, flushed with excitement over prospective adventure.

In a quarter of an hour she reappeared, attired in her best dress, and looking charming, indeed.

After kissing her mother, she and Wylton set out at once for the heart of the city.

Poor misguided Blanche!

Had she been aware that every word uttered at the cottage had been overheard by an eavesdropper, she would have turned back in dismay.

The eavesdropper dogged them back into the city, and almost to the very door of the Wylton mansion.

Then he turned away, with a chuckle of satisfaction, at the discovery he had made.

The eavesdropper was Doc Derringer, the sleepless detective.

CHAPTER XII.

DOC INTERVIEWS THE DUCHESS.

LATER that same day Doc Derringer might have been seen seated in the grand parlor of the residence of the Duchess Van Tassel.

He was alone and undisguised, and was evidently awaiting the appearance of the hostess.

Doc was seated near the parlor door, and there was an expression of firm resolve upon his face. He had not long to wait.

The Duchess soon swept into the parlor 'mid the noise of rustling silks. She was handsomely attired, and looked even more beautiful than when the detective had previously seen her.

As soon as she entered the room Doc arose, closed and locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

The Duchess turned upon him with a startled cry.

"What do you mean?" she gasped, turning pale.

"You will excuse me, madam, but I called to see you on a matter of business. Pray be seated!"

"Who are you?" she demanded, unheeding his request.

"I am a detective, madam—Doc Derringer is my name, and I have a warrant for your arrest. However, if you will be seated, perhaps some arrangements can be made by which you need not be locked up!"

The cool announcement of the detective nearly took the woman's breath away, and she sunk back upon a sofa paler than before.

"In God's name, what have I done, that a warrant be issued for my arrest?" she gasped.

"Oh! nothing much, except running a faro-bank contrary to the law, and selling liquor without a license," Doc replied. "You've long been suspected and I was detailed to look into the matter."

"You, then, are—?"

"Mr. Atherton, your boarder. Did I feel disposed, I might arrest you for keeping a 'fence' for burglars, but I am inclined to be lenient with you, providing we can come to anything like terms."

"Well, what do you want?" she demanded, in a measure regaining her self-possession.

"I want to inquire into the history of the lady who wore the white mask at the faro-table!"

"Oh! Ma'm'selle Aimee, you mean? Well, sir, you can learn none of her personal history from me, for I know absolutely nothing about it."

Derringer gave vent to a hard, sarcastic laugh.

"Bosh!" he said, snapping his thumb and

forefinger contemptuously. "Don't try any such nonsense as that, for it won't work. You're not the woman to admit a masked person into your house, except you know who and what she is."

"I know nothing of Aimee, more than that she has a secret that causes her to wish to keep masked!" the Duchess persisted.

"You know who and what she is," Doc declared, "and so do I!"

"Oh! do you?" sarcastically.

"I do! She has been an inmate of your house for a matter of two weeks."

The Duchess winced a trifle, and the detective's keen eyes noticing the fact, he smiled.

"When she came to you," he went on, "it was one of the stormiest nights of the season, and her attire consisted of a hooded waterproof cloak, and, underneath, a night-robe. She had only just risen from a bed of sickness, and when she reached your house was more dead than alive."

The Duchess looked her astonishment.

"Am I not right? Of course I am. You took the poor girl in, nursed her back to life, and then, after clothing her in fascinating attire, coaxed her to become one of the attractions of your faro-room. She was desperate, and with a hope of winning some money, by the use of which she could afterward gain power, she consented."

"Well, what of it, sir?" the Duchess retorted. "If I picked a poor forlorn creature up out of the streets and cared for her, I do not know that it is any of your business to come prying for information concerning her, when she prefers to hide herself from the world!"

"It is my business, madam. As a detective, I desire to meet her, for I have information for her that she would prize highly."

"You cannot see her, for she is not here."

"I know better!"

"You know nothing of the sort. She comes here evenings, but is absent during the day."

"Where?"

"By her own request I am not at liberty to say."

Derringer was silent a moment.

"Duchess," he said, finally, "you are a bad woman, and I must do my duty!"

"I am not a bad woman!" she broke out, quickly—"at least not in the way you mean. If I do run a faro-room, it is no more than hundreds of others do. Beyond that I am not wicked nor sinful. I have as good a heart as any one, and when I say I befriended Aimee through no more selfish motive than charity and pity, I tell you God's honest truth. You are at liberty to believe me or not as you please."

"You have wronged me by intimating that I harbor burglars. I know that Daly and some of his pals come here, but beyond the fact that they spend their money at the faro-table, they are no more to me than you are, and I know absolutely nothing of their doings outside of my house."

"Yet you have been seen out riding with Daly?"

"Very true. I did that merely out of spite, to show the aristocrats who once knew me, but afterward snubbed me, how little I cared for them. Once, you may have heard, I was the reigning belle of this city, but after my unfortunate union with Van Tassel, swell society counted me out of the list of their acquaintances."

"And you say you do not know the history of the young woman you call Aimee?"

"No. She gave me that as her name, but of her past said nothing. I pitied her from the bottom of my heart, and have every reason to believe that she has had dire trouble in the past."

"If you could be of assistance in helping this Aimee right a wrong, would you do so?"

"Without hesitation I answer, yes!"

"Even at the pain of self-sacrifice?"

A strange expression came upon the beautiful woman's face.

"Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Because I would like to know."

"Well, I cannot exactly say as to that. It would depend altogether what the sacrifice was."

"Duchess, are you acquainted with Henry Wylton, the broker?"

"Slightly, sir."

And again that strange expression swept over her face.

Derringer was watching her like a hawk, and lost nothing.

"Did you ever hear of the Wylton-Lindsay elopement case, of over nine months ago?" he next asked.

The Duchess grew suddenly white.

"Yes, I have heard of it!" she replied, in a tone that was scarcely audible and was fraught with nervousness.

"It was a sad case," Derringer went on, calmly. "The two undoubtedly loved each other, and fled to Chicago where they went to house-keeping in a modest manner, and all the world seemed bright to them. In the midst of their fancied security, however, Wylton appeared upon the scene and had Lindsay arrested for bigamy. He was brought up in court, and Wylton produced as evidence a woman whom he hired for the purpose, and this lying creature stood up and swore before God and man that Lloyd Lindsay was her husband by a previous marriage!"

"The upshot of the matter was that Lindsay was bundled off to jail and Wylton brought his daughter back home. After that she was never seen out of doors except in his company. Now, Duchess, what do you think of a woman who would for money thus perjure herself, and at the same time put asunder a loving husband and wife, who had never done her harm?"

The Duchess had grown still whiter and leaned back among the cushions, with breath coming hard and fast.

"I—I don't know," she articulated, faintly. "It seems to me that prison would be too good for such a woman!"

"So say I!" Derringer declared, emphatically.

"But I haven't told you all of the story. A few weeks ago Hazel Lindsay gave birth to her child—hers and Lloyd's—at her father's residence. She was kept under the influence of narcotics after the event until that night about two weeks ago, that wild stormy night when Aimee came to your shelter. That night Hazel first awoke to consciousness."

"That same night, too, Lloyd Lindsay returned to Denver, and went direct to the Wylton house. He was shown into the parlor and there a stormy interview took place between himself and Wylton. Of what transpired I have no positive data, but certain it is that Lindsay did not leave the house that night, nor has he since been seen. He is a prisoner somewhere in or about the Wylton residence."

"About the time that Wylton and Lindsay were in the parlor Hazel awoke to consciousness, and discovering that her babe had been taken from her, demanded of the attendant doctor to know where it was. He refused to tell her, and, in a fit of desperation she stabbed him. She then rushed down-stairs. In the lower hall she heard a yell in the parlor, and recognizing Lloyd's voice she burst into the room. But Lloyd was nowhere to be seen! She demanded of her father to know where he was and what had become of her child, but he refused to give her any information whatever. This made her still more desperate, and she shot her father and fled from the house."

"Thus, the Aimee, who nightly graces your faro-table, is no one else than Hazel Lindsay. You know that as well as I do, Duchess. You cannot deny that!"

"Well, since you seem so well posted, sir, I don't suppose there is any use of denying it!" the Duchess replied. "She came to me, told me her story, and asked me to give her shelter from the curious gaze of the world. She aroused my pity and I did take her in, and have done all I could to help her along!"

"And why shouldn't you do so, madam—you, most especially, of all women?"

"Why shouldn't I? Well, I don't know as I understand you, sir. I don't know why I should be particularly more entitled to take her in and care for her than a thousand-and-one other women!"

"You don't, eh? Well, I do. You are the woman who is in a measure the cause of all her suffering! It is you who ruthlessly deprived her of her happiness! It was your damning testimony that sent Lloyd Lindsay to prison! Deny that if you can!"

Derringer had arisen to his feet, and the index finger of his right hand was pointed directly at her.

His tone was almost fierce and accusing.

She grew deathly white, and buried her face in her hands, as if to shut out some haunting vision, while her breath came and went in quick, convulsive gasps, and a tremor shook her figure.

Derringer watched her with a triumphant glitter in his eyes.

Little by little, inch by inch, he had worked the game, until he was now satisfied that he had divined the truth.

It was the Duchess whom Henry Wylton had employed to appear against Lindsay, at Chicago.

Her very agitation now was conclusive proof of the fact.

She kept her face buried in her hands for several minutes, during which time Doc watched her calculatingly. Then she arose and moved toward him with queenly grace, her face pallid, her eyes glistening.

"Detective Derringer," she said, "allow me to thank you for coming here to-day, for your coming has been, or at least will be, the means of changing the whole future course of my life. I acknowledge that I have sinned grievously, but I have also been sinned against. The usage of the world hardened me to what I have been."

"I acknowledge that I have wronged Lloyd and Hazel Lindsay, and that it was I who was the instrument of the diabolical villain, Henry Wylton, in Chicago. But tell me, sir, is it too late to repair that wrong?"

"By no means!"

"Then tell me what to do, and I will do it. Henceforth I shall lead a better life. This house shall no longer be open to the public, and the vices that knew me of yore shall know me no longer!"

There were tears in the beautiful woman's eyes, that told how much in earnest she was.

"I am glad to hear you say so," Doc said, feelingly, as he shook her by the hand, "and if I have been the means of the change, I am truly glad. The first thing for you to do is to see Hazel and tell her of what I have told you. Confess to her your own sin, and your good intentions, and tell her I am her friend, and ere another twenty-four hours elapse, that I will restore her to her husband and babe."

"But do you know where the child is?"

"I do."

"And you think Lloyd Lindsay is a prisoner in Wylton's house?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. I already have a spy there, looking over the situation. I am liable to hear from him at almost any minute. Now I must be going. Prepare Hazel, and likewise yourself, to take part in an extraordinary denouement, to-morrow morning, shortly after sunrise!"

"Indeed? Oh, explain, please. I am eager to know what it is!"

"Well, I'll tell you briefly, for I must be off. Years ago Wylton made a promise that his daughter should marry a certain friend of his, when she became twenty, at which time Wylton was to receive fifty thousand dollars!"

"Oh! yes. Hazel has told me all about that."

"Well, this friend, the judge, has arrived in town to claim his bride and pay over the stipulated sum. Wylton, put to his wits' end, has substituted another girl to play the rôle of Hazel—one Blanche Baker by name—and this impostor has already gone to Wylton's house. In the morning, to-morrow, after breakfast, she is to wed the judge, and the bride and groom are to start at once for Europe, that is, if nothing happens to the contrary. Something will happen, however, for we shall drop in to have a word to say about that ceremony taking place."

"I shall call for you and Hazel half-an-hour before daybreak; so be in readiness to accompany me."

"We will be ready," the Duchess replied. "The wrong I did Lloyd and Hazel shall be righted if I die for it!"

Doc Derringer took his departure, feeling triumphant, now that his ruse and effrontery had opened the way to a consummate victory.

From the residence of the Duchess he made a visit to the principal hotels until he found the one at which the judge was registered.

Here he put in at least an hour!

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER VICTORY.

NIGHT came on once more with intense darkness and a drizzling rain, that bid fair to continue for an indefinite period.

Few people were abroad whose vocation did not keep them out of doors. The gas lamps shed but a sickly light, and everything exposed to the storm was damp and dripping.

Doc Derringer reached his hotel about supper time, and found a letter awaiting him addressed:

"DOKTER DERRINGER, Eskwire."

A single glance at the superscription satisfied him that it was a communication from Banty the bootblack, and he opened it eagerly.

The following was what he read:

"DOK: Hev made A discovery. Important!! Cum erround ter the bak dore, tew nite, after 12 o'clock. No dog. All sleep. Rapp tew times kearful. Yures, "BANTY."

That was all, but it was enough to make Derringer exultant.

"Ten to one the kid has found where Lindsay is imprisoned," he mused. "If not, the chances are big that he has made a discovery that will lead to a speedy release. Jehu! It never rains but it pours, and if I only had as much purchase on the burglar racket as I have on old Wylton I'd feel like a fighting cock."

He remained in the hotel office until he grew tired of being indoors; then putting on his oil-skin coat he left the hotel.

As he emerged from it he saw the young man in the silk hat and Prince Albert coat passing—the same chap Banty the bootblack had previously called his attention to, and whom we have known as Handsome Jim Moran.

The fellow carried a silk umbrella, to keep the rain off his shiny tile, and in the other hand held a bundle done up in brown wrapping paper.

He seemed to be in something of a hurry, for he was walking quite rapidly.

In passing the hotel, however, he did not see Derringer standing in the entrance; nor did he seem to be suspicious of any one watching him, or intending to shadow him.

The bundle he carried, however, attracted the detective's attention at once, and buttoning his oilcoat closely about his figure, he descended the hotel steps and took to shadowing the suspect.

He kept so far in the rear of Moran that there was little danger of his pursuit being suspected.

A long tramp the detective was led, that only ended when the extreme western limits of the Catholic cemetery were reached—a journey which, in its roundabout way, entailed fully two miles of travel.

When Moran reached the point in question, he did not at once seek to enter the cemetery, but stood for some time in the shadow of a tree, near where there was an opening in the fence, caused by the removal of a couple of pickets.

For fully five minutes he remained motionless, as if to ascertain if any one had dogged his footsteps; then, as he saw or heard nothing to give him alarm, he entered the cemetery through the gap in the fence.

He still carried the bundle, but had closed his umbrella, and, in disregard for the falling rain, pushed eagerly toward the heart of the burial-place, where marble shafts and slabs reared their shapes in irregular spectral dignity.

A few minutes' walk brought the burglar to where a large single marble slab covered the entrance to a vault, which was one of several in its immediate vicinity.

Here Moran paused long enough to deposit his bundle, and then, after looking sharply around him, disappeared behind a clump of bushes near at hand.

He soon returned, however, bearing in his grasp a crowbar.

With this he at once set to work at prying the stone slab aside, and in a few minutes had a cavernous bricked-up hole exposed to view, from out of which arose an odor that was sickening, to say the least.

Moran did not appear to mind the smell, however, for an odd chuckle escaped him as he laid aside the crowbar and proceeded to unwrap the bundle he had brought with him.

To do this consumed but a few moments' time, and as a result he brought to light an ordinary grain-bag, and a lantern, which he lit.

He then dropped down through the opening he had made, into the vault!

Here he was absent for upward of a quarter of an hour; then boosting up a bagful of something out of the tomb, he clambered out himself.

"At last!" he muttered, as he seized the crowbar, to restore the slab to its proper place. "I have but to remove this bag of stuff to the edge of the cemetery, and then return for it with a wagon, and I'm all O. K. Once I have it and myself on board of the cars, ticketed for the East, and Joe Daly and his Ducks can go to Hades for all I care. Denver is getting too hot for my liking, and I'm not anxious to remain long enough here to fall into the clutches of that infernal Doc Derringer! No, sir-ee!"

"There's plate and swag enough in this bag to net me a handsome sum in Chicago; therefore, to Chicago it goes on the first train, and Daly and his gang can whistle for all they ever get out of it!"

His words had been uttered in an audible tone, and it was plain that he had no anticipation of any one being near enough to overhear him.

He was mistaken, however, for, as he ceased

speaking a heavy hand gripped his shoulder, and a voice spoke in savage intensity:

"Oho! Ye will, will ye? Ye will try to play crooked with yer pals, ye cuss'd traitor! Well, p'raps I may have a word or two to say about that, me daisy!"

Moran gave a terrified glance over his shoulder, only to perceive that it was Dan Morgan, one of the Ducks!

Morgan was a man of powerful physique, while Moran was slender and of rather weakly build.

The gripe that Morgan had upon the latter's shoulder was vise-like, and from the captor's eyes there shone a deadly, revengeful light.

"So you would play us false!" Morgan repeated, bending his gaze closer to that of Moran. "You would steal the plunder and make off in the dead of night, thinking no one suspected you of treachery? Answer me, dog! What have you to say for yourself before I kill you?"

"What have I to say for myself?" replied Moran, drawing his every nerve to its utmost tension, while his breath came hard and desperation was the overruling expression of his countenance. "What I have to say, Morgan, is—death to you and preservation for myself! Take that, you meddler!"

With a suddenness that was surprising, Moran's right hand flashed through the air; there was a sickening thud followed by a groan from Moran's lips, as he released his grasp upon Moran's shoulder, tottered backward and fell to the ground.

Without waiting to see whether or not his blow had proved fatal, Moran seized the booty bag, flung it over his shoulder, and would have made off with it but for the fact that he suddenly found himself confronted by a man who pressed the cold muzzle of a pistol against his temple.

The man was Doc Derringer!

"Drop that bag!" Doc ordered, in a tone whose sternness was unmistakable. "Drop it, I say, or I'll drop you!"

Moran, who was at heart a coward, did not hesitate to obey.

He stood now in mortal terror of arrest, and Doc's sudden appearance upon the scene quite paralyzed the burglar and murderer.

"Throw up your hands!" was Doc's next command, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the detective had clapped a pair of handcuffs about Moran's wrists.

"Now, then, you stand still while I see whether you have killed your pal or not," Doc enjoined. "If you have, I don't suppose any one will be particularly sorry. If a few of you chaps could be killed off every day, it would be a blessing to the community."

Upon examination he found that Moran was not dangerously wounded, and that the rain falling in his face would soon revive him, so forcing Moran to kneel beside the prostrate ruffian, he handcuffed the two rogues together.

In addition to this, he also further secured them by the use of cords, so that there was no reasonable likelihood of their making their escape.

Morgan soon regained consciousness, when Derringer forced him to arise and walk alongside of Moran, as the trio betook their way back into the city.

Doc carried the bag of stolen goods which Moran had resurrected from the tomb; and about ten o'clock in the evening the dauntless Derringer, by a roundabout way, succeeded in landing his prisoners in the police station, without creating any particular excitement, few people being on the street or in the vicinity.

The chief of police, who chanced to be present, was greatly pleased at Doc's opportune capture, and authorized the Department to have a sharp lookout kept for Joe Daly and the remainder of the gang.

A squad of officers was also detailed to visit the vault in the cemetery, and see if any more booty was concealed there, and the result of the visit was highly satisfactory, for a large quantity of stolen articles was found, the majority of which Moran had not attempted to remove, owing to the bulk of the goods.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEARCHING FOR LINDSAY.

It was fully midnight when Doc Derringer set out for the Wylton mansion.

It was still raining, and he was bundled up in his oilcoat, besides being armed with revolvers and a dark-lantern.

He had his plan of action well arranged; if it succeeded, he would achieve a double victory—score a signal triumph.

A fenced-up alley ran along one side of the house to the area, and Doc followed this, cautiously, and finally arrived at the rear door, which overlooked a little garden plot.

Waiting a few minutes, and listening intently, the silent shadower softly tapped on the kitchen door, as directed in Banty's note.

The door almost immediately opened, and there came a shrill whisper of:

"Come in! I knowed ye'd be on hand."

Derringer passed in, to find himself in a neatly furnished kitchen, of which there were two occupants besides himself—the one, Banty, the bootblack, who softly closed and bolted the door; the other a fat, coal-black negress of immense avoirdupois, and past middle age, who sat fast asleep in an arm-chair.

The only light was that of a candle upon the table, near which was a pitcher and beer-glass, which suggested that some one had been "rushing the growler."

Banty himself was attired in a suit of gray livery with brass buttons, knee pants, and so forth, and as his face was washed and hair combed, he looked so changed from his usual rough-and-tumble appearance that his former associates would scarcely have recognized him.

Derringer surveyed him for a moment admiringly, and then turned an inquiring glance toward the negress, who was snoring at a round rate.

"Oh, ye needn't be afeard of her!" Banty declared, with a grin. "Old Huldah aire sowed up so she don't know her head from a hedgehog. She takes kinder natural to booze, and she has kept me rushin' the growler nigh about all the evenin', till she got so stiff she couldn't wiggle her tongue. The last growlerful I got, I mixed a little pepper in it, an' you can bet she's asleep for all night!"

"And the other?"

"Oh, they're asleep, too, long ago."

"Well, what's the news? I got your note, and am anxious to know what discoveries you have made!"

"Heaps, Doc, heaps! In the first place, the real Hazel Wylton ain't here, but there's another gal come, who lets on she is Hazel, an' is goin' to marry a rich chap they call the judge. That I've got onto, sure pop!"

"I am aware of that already. When is the ceremony going to take place?"

"At seven, after breakfast, this mornin' a-comin'."

"Whereabouts?"

"In the parlor."

"Are you to be at the door?"

"Yes, an' I've got partic'ler orders not to admit any one to the house."

"Good enough! I shall be present. Now, what other discoveries have you made?"

"I have searched the cellar an' the rest o' the house purty much without findin' the feller, but I've tumbled to one peculiar racket that may pan out well."

"What is it?"

"Just take off your mud-scows an' foller me cautious-like and I'll show you."

Derringer lost no time in removing his boots; then taking the candle Banty led the way.

They passed noiselessly from the kitchen into the dark, silent hall, and made their way to the richly-furnished parlor.

Placing the candle upon the table, Banty turned to Derringer, a quizzical expression on his keen face.

"It were from this room that yer friend were supposed to hev mysteriously disappeared!" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, now, just look over the place and see if you can guess where he went to, ef he didn't leave by the parlor door, or wasn't throw'd out o' one o' the windies!" Banty suggested, with a grin.

"There's no time to be wasied in needless search," Derringer replied. "Whatever you have found out let me know at once."

"Not much, Mister Doc!" was the provoking rejoinder. "If you ain't smart enough to find a secret door leading out of this room, you can go wi'out knowin'. I tumbled to it on fu'st investigation!"

Derringer made direct for the marble paneling, which flanked the fireplace underneath the big mantel.

He spent a moment examining this; then shook his head grimly, and looked about the room for some other possible secret exit.

Near the mantel was a pier-glass that reached from floor to ceiling, and was apparently fastened solidly against the wall.

The detective advanced toward this, and as he did so, Banty stepped to the opposite side of

the room, and touched a tiny button that protruded just a trifle from the wall.

Instantly the mirror began to sink downward out of sight, until it had entirely disappeared below the carpeted surface of the parlor floor!

Back of the wall where the mirror had stood was a niche, wherein two men could easily have stood, had there been anything to stand on, which there was not; no flooring whatever—nothing but a dark, yawning hole, some two and a half or three feet square, that appeared to be a big shaft down to the cellar or some region below.

Derringer paused at the edge of this shaft and gazed downward for a moment in amazement; then he turned to Banty, who still had his thumb pressed against the button in the wall.

"Come here!" Derringer motioned, his lips moving in a whisper.

Banty obeyed, and immediately after he removed his thumb from the button the mirror glided noiselessly upward to its former position.

"So that is your discovery, eh?" Doc inquired.

"Yes, Mister Doc, that is the boss trap ov this 'ere Black Crook performance."

"It's a clever contrivance; how did you come to find out about it?"

"Same way Kerlumbus found Ameriky—by exploration!" Banty replied, with a comical wink and grin.

"Have you been down in that hole yet?"

"Nixee! Don't ketch this cherub 'splorin' sech places as that. If I'd tried to go down thar, the lukin'-glass w'd ha' come up on me, an' I'd ha' been in a purty fix."

"Well, no time must be lost. I must explore the place, while you keep the mirror down. Is there any rope about the premises?"

"Yas; there's a good one down cellar."

"Then make haste and get it."

Banty hurried noiselessly away, and in a few minutes returned with a piece of hem rope some thirty feet in length.

Derringer had removed his oil coat and lit his dark lantern, which was fastened to the belt about his waist, thus giving him the use of both hands.

He next fastened one end of the rope to a piano leg, the instrument standing in such a position that the weight would not move it.

Then, ordering Banty to press the button and lower the glass, the cavity was once more exposed to view.

"So yer goin' down in thar, be ye?" Banty demanded, rather dubiously.

"I certainly am," Derringer replied; "and if I never return, you go to Police Headquarters, make known where I disappeared, and cause an investigation to be made."

"Kerect! I'll do it. But yer don't expect yer goin' ter fetch up in Chiner, do ye?"

"I have but little idea where I may land," Doc replied, and, without further words, he dropped the loosened end of the rope into the opening, swung himself over the shaft, and disappeared from view.

Banty would have given considerable to have watched his pard's descent, but could not leave his post at the button.

Allowing himself to slip down for a distance of some ten feet, Doc found himself in a small vault that was walled up with stone and mortar, but had a board floor.

Examining this, the detective discovered a spring trap, which would yield to his weight and let him down into a lower compartment.

In landing upon the floor he had not touched directly upon the trap, else he would have gone on down into the sub-cellar.

After a little experimenting by prying with his knife, he found that he could lift the two wings of the trap and lay them over against the wall, and when he had done this, an opening similar to the one above was disclosed, only that it was round.

It needed only a glance to apprise the explorer that the trap covered the mouth of an old well, and he shuddered when the realization struck him that it was very probable Lloyd Lindsay lay dead at the bottom of this well.

What was best to do? Should he at once attempt to explore further and reach the bottom of the well?

He still had a considerable length of rope at his command, but would it reach to the bottom of the pit or not?

Resolving to investigate, he detached the lantern from his belt, and fastening it to the end of the rope lowered it slowly downward.

He was soon able to distinguish the bottom, which was some ten feet below him and perfectly dry.

The bottom was also larger in circumference than the mouth of the well, and stretched out upon it was the figure of a man whose head was pillowed upon his arm.

Was he dead? or was he simply slumbering?

Doc concluded that the latter was the case, for there was a small basket and tin pail close at hand which had probably been used to lower food and water to the prisoner.

The detective now swung the lantern back and forth until it struck the slumbering man's cheek.

The effect was electrical, for it instantly awakened the slumberer, and he sat up, with a startled exclamation.

For a few seconds the glare of the lantern's light seemed to nearly blind him, and he was forced to shade his eyes with his hands.

"Lindsay, is that you?" the detective at once called out.

"Yes! yes!" came back the faint but eager reply. "Who's there?"

"It is I—Doc Derringer. Be patient now and I'll have you out of there in a jiffy. Are you hurt?"

"One of my legs is badly sprained—that's all!"

"All right! Wait until I draw the lantern up and I'll lower the rope for you."

This was soon done and Lindsay climbed up into the first cellar beside his liberator.

In a few minutes more the two friends stood in the Wylton parlor shaking hands, while Banty had allowed the mirror to return to its proper position and stood near at hand grinning from ear to ear.

"Derringer, my true and tried friend, I shall never be able to repay you for this act of mercy!" Lindsay said, gratefully. "I doubt if I could have lived in that terrible den much longer, for I was constantly growing weaker and weaker, and a terrible death stared me in the face!"

"No pay will be asked of you, Lindsay, my boy. I am only too glad to be able to find and rescue you. Give thanks to my young partner here, Banty, for it was he who located your prison. But, tell us all about how you came to be down in that hole."

Lindsay did so. He had come back to Denver that stormy night which opened our story, with the full determination of repossessing himself of Hazel, his wife.

During the stormy interview between himself and Henry Wylton, the latter had hurled a heavy vase at him, which, striking him on the forehead, had knocked him back upon a sofa.

The next he remembered was of falling down! down! through the trap; and striking upon the hard bottom of the well; then consciousness once more entirely left him.

When his consciousness returned he groped about him, to find that food and water were at hand, and this had since been daily supplied him, although he had never seen who had lowered it into the well, as it was always lowered at such times as he was asleep.

Derringer then related to him the main incidents that have transpired during the course of our story, and made known to him that he was soon to be restored to his wife, and the babe whom he had never seen, and also apprised him of what would in all probability happen in that very room, within a few hours.

To say that Lindsay was overjoyed would be "drawing it mild," and he showered blessings upon Doc and Banty, as only a thoroughly grateful man could.

Giving the happy Banty a series of instructions, the detective and Lindsay took their departure, to complete preparations for the surprise-party that was to be tendered Henry Wylton a few hours later.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

If a pleasant day could be said to be auspicious, the one that dawned the morning after the events last chronicled, ought to have gladdened the heart of ambitious Blanche Baker, who proposed to play the rôle of Hazel Wylton, and marry the vast wealth of the judge.

At the Wylton residence every one was astir at an early hour.

Old Huldah had fully recovered from the effects of the previous night's indulgence, and waddled industriously about, engaged in preparing the morning repast. Banty occupied his position in the hall, looking decidedly chipper and wide-awake. Henry Wylton bustled about, arranging things in general, and in nowise showing that he was ill at ease, or anticipating any immediate trouble; while Blanche and the judge

were, at that early hour, seated *tete a tete* in the parlor, the former gay, chatty, vivacious, the latter looking rather more grave and sedate than was his usual wont, as he sat beside his betrothed, and allowed her to do the most of the talking.

Was it because he realized the important step he was soon to take, that he looked so grave? Perhaps!

Nearly one of the first things that Henry Wylton did was to put Banty through a course of instructions, concerning what was expected of him.

"Now, my boy," he said, patting Banty on the shoulder, patronizingly, "I want to impress upon your memory what you are to do, and what you are not to do. Do you think you can bear in mind what I tell you?"

"Reckon I can," Banty replied. "I've got a memory like a forty-mile search-warrant, and I never forgets what I'm told."

"That's a good boy; and I want you to be extra particular on this occasion. Now, I've already told you that my daughter is to be married this morning!"

"Yes, sir."

"Before the ceremony my daughter, her future husband, the judge, and myself, will breakfast, at precisely seven o'clock. As we pass from the parlor, *en route* for the dining-room, you are to make a low obeisance!"

"Kerect, boss! I kin knock off one o' the dandiest Al bows of any dude in town!"

"Very well. And while we are at breakfast, it is likely the Reverend Mr. Mack will arrive. You are to answer the summons, and if you find at the door a clerical-looking gent, who has gray hair, and wears green goggles, you are to invite him to enter, and politely conduct him to a seat in the parlor; take his hat and gloves and place them on the piano, and then bow yourself out of his presence, first announcing to him that you will advise your master of his arrival. Can you remember all that?"

"Reckon I can, boss."

"Well, when we return from breakfast to the parlor, and the parlor door is closed, the ceremony will immediately take place. If the bell rings, you are under no circumstances to answer the summons until the parlor door again opens. Remember that!"

"Kerect, boss. I've got it all down as fine as a knittin'-needle, you bet!"

"Very well. See that you do as I have bidden you, and I will reward you for it."

The broker hurried away while the lad gazed after him with a comical grin.

"By blinkers! that makes me sick!" he silently soliloquized. "That old jay is puttin' on more airs than a winnin' hoss jockey. Wait till Doc an' the gang goes waltzin' inter the parlor like two-forty on the home stretch! That will make Hanky sweat shingle-nails, or my name ain't Napoleon Banty!"

And the bootblack chuckled softly to himself, in anticipation of the surprise that was in store for the scheming scoundrel.

At exactly seven o'clock breakfast was announced, and the bridal party, escorted by Henry Wylton, left the parlor and made their way to the dining-room where Huldah had done her level best to set forth a tempting repast.

As they passed him, Banty nearly forgot to make his obeisance, so intent was he upon watching the bogus Hazel, who looked pretty, bright and happy, and in nowise guilty at the step she proposed to take.

He managed, however, to jerk off a respectable sort of a bow, while mentally he soliloquized:

"My, oh! my, oh! but ain't that a gallus team! Thet aire gal has got more gall than a steam engine what wants the hull right o' way of the track. She feels jest like a young colt does afore he tries to kick over the whiffle-tree. An' the old duffer—how he's goin' ter get tuk in an' dome up, if Doc don't arrive in time to stop the ceremony!"

"I'd just like to step up and whisper in the old cove's ear that he's playin' a blind ante. Tain't none o' my business, tho', I suppose. If he's stuck on gittin' married so bad, that he can't tell the gal he's in love with from the one he ain't in love with, why, he ought to be stuck."

The people were at breakfast about half-an-hour and then returned to the parlor.

But the clergyman had not yet arrived.

It was nearly eight o'clock when the bell rung, and Banty answered the summons.

The Rev. Mr. Mack, green goggles and all, was at the door, and no skilled usher could have conducted him into the parlor with more grace and decorum than did the bootblack, while the

obsequious manner in which he retired must have won the admiration of those present.

When he emerged into the hall, however, perspiration stood in beads upon the youth's brow.

"Great Caesar! I wouldn't go through that mill ag'in for all the millions of the Vanderbilts!" he muttered. "It's no use o' tryin' to make a wild bull-thistle grow up an' have the same grace as a hot-house plant. Once I was a forlorn boot-black, happy as a lark; now I am a halfway dude without a vital spark. When to-day's matinee is over, I go back to the blackin' an' the brush, an' then I'll live in clover an' make old bizness rush! I wasn't born for a high-toner nohow, an' they say what ain't born in the blood can't be polished off wi' a grindstone!"

After Banty's exit from the parlor Henry Wylton closed the door, when Miss Baker called Wylton to one side.

"I am very much worried," she said, "that mother has not appeared. She should have been here an hour ago at least. How do you account for her absence?"

"Undoubtedly she has been delayed on account of the child," Wylton replied, blandly. "Don't let that annoy you in the least. Go on and perform your part the same as if she was here and all will be right."

"I will do nothing of the sort," Blanche protested impulsively. "If mother is not present I will not be married to that man!"

A sarcastic smile overspread Wylton's face.

"Well, suit yourself," he said. "I am in no way responsible for the temporary absence of your mother. If you want your marriage indefinitely postponed, no doubt you can arrange the matter by speaking to the judge. The train leaves in two hours, and perhaps he would rather miss matrimony than the train. You can consult him at your pleasure!"

And Wylton turned abruptly away with a shrug of the shoulders.

Blanche gazed after him with a fierce gleam in her eyes; then returned to the judge.

She realized that she was in the power of an unscrupulous villain, who would turn upon her should she refuse to obey his mandate.

On the one hand were riches and luxury; on the other, defeat and disgrace!

There was but one alternative; she must not back out—she must marry the judge.

At a few minutes after eight o'clock the clergyman arose, motioned to Wylton, and the two held a whispered consultation.

The couple about to be married were then requested to stand up in front of the clergyman, who read the first formula of the Episcopal marriage service.

Then came the usual questions until the judge was asked:

"Do you take this woman for your legally wedded wife, and promise, before God and man, to love, honor, support and protect her during all the days of your life?"

There was an instant of impressive silence; then the judge suddenly released his hand from the clasp of the false Hazel, and raising it on high, cried out sternly:

"As God is my judge, I do not! I denounce this woman as an impostor and fraud!"

"An impostor, sir?" gasped the astounded clergyman.

"An impostor!" echoed Wylton, springing forward, pallor whitening his face. "Good heavens, judge, what do you mean?"

"I mean," replied the judge, folding his arms across his breast, and looking the base plotter in the eye, "that you have tried to play your villainous game on the wrong man. Do you want the proof?"

He stamped his foot heavily upon the parlor floor.

Instantly the door was flung open, and a number of persons filed into the room, Doc Derringer taking the lead!

He was armed with two cocked revolvers, one in either grasp.

Then came Banty, the bootblack, armed with a pair of handcuffs.

Following Banty came Lloyd and Hazel Lindsay, the Duchess, and two policemen in citizen's dress.

At sight of these, Henry Wylton retreated to the wall with an execration, while Blanche Baker, realizing her disgraceful situation, fell to the floor in a swoon.

"Henry Wylton," said Derringer, advancing, "please step forward. I have several things to say to you."

"Whatever you have to say, I can hear where I am," Wylton returned, his face expressing the passion of a desperate man.

"Well, I presume you know what brings me

here," Derringer said coolly. "I have come early as it is in the day, with a warrant for your arrest."

"A warrant for my arrest, sir?"

"Exactly."

"What is the charge?"

"Conspiracy. You conspired to separate a legally wedded husband and wife, and, through false testimony, you succeeded in casting the husband into prison; you, yourself, have kept him imprisoned in a vault beneath your house for a matter of over two weeks. Then, you have tried to defraud this gentleman,"—pointing to the judge—"by an attempt to palm off on him, as your daughter, one Blanche Baker. These charges are included in the first warrant. In the second warrant—"

"In the second warrant!" gasped Wylton.

"Exactly sir. In the second warrant you are charged by James Moran, known as Handsome Jim, and Daniel Morgan, by their confession, as being the chief of the band of burglars, known as the Ducks of Denver, who have lately been operating in this city! Therefore, by the order of the chief of police of this city, I order you to surrender to arrest!"

"Who are you?"

"Doc Derringer, detective."

"Curse you! I will not surrender."

"Then I will take you, dead or alive! I order you to surrender. Banty, follow me!"

With leveled weapons the detective advanced toward his man, Banty following close in his rear.

"Hazel! Hazel! save me!" Wylton cried, turning an appealing glance toward where he had last seen his wronged daughter standing.

But, she too had fainted.

The look of desperation increased upon the broker's face.

He measured the distance intervening between him and the detective, and then, before any one could divine his purpose, he darted forward with a vengeful cry, and plunged bodily through the mirror that covered the entrance to the secret trap!

He had played his game out, but the end had come at last, as it must come, eventually, in any game in this life.

We need not take much space in relating what remains to be told of this tale.

When the body of Henry Wylton was hoisted out of the pit wherein Lloyd Lindsay had been imprisoned, it was cold and stiff in death, and so cut with glass as to be hardly recognizable.

The next day Denver was shocked to learn that their esteemed citizen, Mr. Wylton, had fallen down stairs and died from the effect of his injuries!

Few, if any, outside of those who were present at the time of his fatal plunge, ever knew how he died.

The secret was kept for Hazel's sake.

It was not until days after Wylton was buried that any intimation of his note-forgery was given; but again for Hazel's sake, it was hushed up, the judge settling the affair, having been restored his fifty thousand dollars, which was recovered from Wylton's person.

Blanche Baker was permitted to go free, when she and her mother at once left Denver for parts unknown.

Not, however, until Hazel's babe was surrendered to her and her happy husband.

True to her promise, the Duchess did the square thing. She confessed to all the bad part she had played; and she also forced upon Lloyd and Hazel, as a retributive compensation, half of her monetary resources, which was more than sufficient to give the beneficiaries a fresh start in life.

The judge, a man of honor, was so pleased with the self-confession and humble penitence of the Duchess, that to-day his stately home, not a hundred miles from Georgetown, is graced with a beautiful and devoted wife, who once reigned as the belle of the Colorado capital!

Soon after her father's death, Hazel and Lloyd returned to Chicago, and still reside on Madison street, happy as the day is long.

Derringer's captures at the cathedral grounds resulted in breaking up the notorious band known as the Ducks of Denver, and Moran was not an hour in jail before he "squealed" on the whole gang, and Morgan soon afterward added his voice.

Joe Daly, his brother Jean, Frank Stacy, Dan Hagerty, George Butrick, and Pat Joyce were quickly run in, and the whole lot were, in due time, serving well-deserved terms of imprisonment.

In his confession, Moran explained his Pannell

racket (which Banty had "sniffed"), and which gave the cue to the organization.

It was his work to get into kitchens where Irish servant girls were employed, to "work" them for contributions toward the Irish Relief Fund, and at the same time to report on the possible chances of forcing an entrance to the house in the rear.

And as to our two friends, Doc Derringer, and Banty, the bootblack, we may add: for preventing his marriage with Blanche Baker, the excellent judge gave Doc a fat purse, while for the detective's part in breaking up the burglar band, he received a handsome compensation.

Derringer, of course, rewarded his bootblack confrère in a liberal manner, and that the two thereafter were inseparable in their work may be assured.

THE END.

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